

Water Service Optimization Study

Salt Spring Island Electoral Area



Capital Regional District | MARCH 2021

Overview

The Salt Spring Island *Water Service Optimization Study* is a joint study commissioned by CRD and the NSSWD with provincial funding to review ways to improve coordination between the public water service providers on the island. The focus of the report identifies options to optimize water service delivery. Both the CRD and NSSWD recognize better integration of water service delivery and management could benefit all residents in effectively managing shared water interests and concerns.

The report provides guidance for improving on-island water governance and administration, and building a collaborative strategy for accessing federal and provincial funding to address Salt Spring's much-needed water infrastructure needs. Based on the Optimization Report, the Province, CRD, and NSSWD are committed to discussing the next steps. Ratepayers will ultimately have to approve any governance and administrative changes.

Background

Salt Spring Island (Salt Spring) water service delivery is carried out by multiple agencies, including the Capital Regional District (CRD), the North Salt Spring Waterworks District (NSSWD), other smaller improvement districts, and private utilities, making it difficult to achieve economies of scale and a coordinated approach to water service delivery.

Currently, the NSSWD owns and operates two water treatment and distribution systems that provide water to approximately 5,500 people. The CRD owns five different water systems, two of which they operate themselves and three others that are operated by NSSWD under contract. Two other water improvement districts (Scott Point and Mt. Belcher) and one private water utility (Erskine Water Society) contract with NSSWD to operate their water systems as well. Harbour View Improvement District is operated by residents of that district.

Water licenses for all the water systems and any well connections with more than one user are issued through the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNR). Island Health regulates the quality of drinking water for sources where there is more than one user through water source approvals and water system construction and operating permits. For a more detailed overview of water responsibility on Salt Spring, please see section *Water Responsibility on Salt Spring Island*.

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A number of different reports, studies and programs have been initiated by various groups and agencies to try to improve coordination of water resource management and/or service delivery on the island. These include the Salt Spring Alliance 'Governance Working Group Report' (2018), the Positively Forward 'Improving Capital Regional District Service Delivery on Salt Spring Island' (2018), the SSIWPA 'Integrated Freshwater Management Program' (2016-present) and the Provincial/CRD joint 'Salt Spring Island Governance Study' (2013) and 'Salt Spring Island Incorporation Study' (2016). While the electors of Salt Spring conclusively decided against municipal incorporation in 2017, to date none of the other reports or studies have been adopted by a local service provider as a blueprint for change.

The island is grappling with water shortages (especially in summer) and the NSSWD has a moratorium on connections to its system. Moving forward, there is recognition by both the CRD and NSSWD that better integration of water service delivery and management would benefit all residents on Salt Spring.

Water Responsibility on Salt Spring Island

Jurisdiction over water is shared by a variety of different agencies and groups on Salt Spring Island.

Province

The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNR) is responsible for the implementation of the Water Sustainability Act (WSA) which includes the allocation and regulation of fresh water. They regulate water by deciding on water licenses for both surface and groundwater diversion and use. Licensees are responsible for payment of fees annually and to meet any conditions associated with the license. Additionally, the province authorizes works in and about a stream and short-term use of water. Dams constructed to store water are also regulated under the Water Sustainability Act.

The Province also maintains a number of long-term observation wells that monitor groundwater levels on the Island and dependent on funding, or need, carries out scientific studies to better manage and protect the freshwater resource on the island. Provincial staff also respond to concerns with licensees, private well owners and the general public.

Island Health is responsible for regulating the quality of drinking water for sources where there is more than one user (e.g. do not regulate private wells for individual households) through water source approvals, water system construction, and operating permits all under the Drinking Water Protection Act. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has responsibility for the Environmental Management Act which has a number of regulations which protect the quality of water.

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CRD

The CRD owns and is responsible for the operation of five water systems on Salt Spring (Fulford, Beddis, Cedar Lane, Cedars of Tuam, and Highland/Fernwood). They contract with North Salt Spring Waterworks District to operate three of the five systems. The CRD also owns and operates three wastewater facilities on Salt Spring. The CRD holds licenses for these systems and is responsible for ensuring compliance with terms and conditions associated with those licenses.

Islands Trust

Islands Trust has a mandate to preserve and protect the islands in the Trust Area. They do this through land-use planning and regulation and conservation. As part of its conservation mandate on Salt Spring, Islands Trust provides funding for the Salt Spring Island Watershed Protection Alliance (SSIWPA) (see below) to protect freshwater sources.

Improvement Districts

The North Salt Spring Waterworks District (NSSWD) provides water to an estimated 5,500 people on Salt Spring Island. It owns and operates two water treatment and distribution systems using lake sources of water and operates six others on contract (two other improvement districts' systems, one private water utility (Erskine Water Society), and three of the five CRD water systems). These systems hold appropriate water licenses to store and divert water (both lake and groundwater).

Three other water improvement districts exist on the island (Scott Point (pop.58), Mt. Belcher (pop.100), and Harbour View (pop.35). Scott Point and Mt. Belcher contract with NSSWD to operate their water systems and Harbour View Improvement District is operated by residents of that district. All three of these systems use groundwater sources.

Private Water Systems

On Salt Spring Island, there are many lots that are not serviced by a public water system. On these properties, land owners are responsible for development and maintenance of their water systems. These lots are serviced in one of the ways described below.

A private groundwater well provides domestic water to one single-family dwelling. In this case, the Water Sustainability Act does not require a water licence and Island Health does not consider the well and works to be a water supply system so does not require that the owner be compliant with the Drinking Water Protection Act.

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A private groundwater well (or wells) provides water to more than one single-family dwelling, a multi-unit residential development, or a multi-unit commercial development. This includes private utilities or water societies regulated by the Water Utilities Act (e.g. the Erksine Water Society) as well as all types of strata developments (e.g. Maracaibo Estates and Merchant Mews) regulated by the Strata Properties Act. In this case, the Water Sustainability Act does require a water licence and Island Health considers the system to be a water supply system so requires that it be compliant with the Drinking Water Protection Act.

A surface water source is used to provide domestic water to one single-family dwelling on a private lot. In this case, the *Water Sustainability Act* does require a water licence, but Island Health does not consider the intake and works to be a water supply system so does not require that the owner be compliant with the *Drinking Water Protection Act*.

- A surface water source is used to provide domestic water to more than one single-family dwelling, a multi-unit residential development, or a multi-unit commercial development. This could include private utilities or water societies regulated by the *Water Utilities Act* or strata developments regulated by the *Strata Properties Act*. In this case, the *Water Sustainability Act* does require a water licence and Island Health considers the system to be a water supply system so requires that it be compliant with the *Drinking Water Protection Act*.
- A private lot collects rainwater for domestic use in one single-family dwelling. Rainwater catchment is not regulated by the *Water Sustainability Act*, so a water licence is not required and Island Health does not consider the catchment or treatment works to be a water supply system so does not require that the owner be compliant with the *Drinking Water Protection Act*. Island Health does not permit rainwater to be used as the water supply for anything other than a single-family dwelling.

Non-Profit

Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society (SSIWPS) - local non-profit whose purpose is to promote and preserve the sources of potable water on Salt Spring. They do this by acquiring land, conducting and promoting scientific studies of water resources and increasing public awareness of the value of water.

Salt Spring Island Watershed Protection Alliance (SSIWPA) – established in 2013 by Islands Trust to coordinate a more integrated approach to water resource management on Salt Spring Island. Members have included both elected officials and/or staff of the Salt Spring Island Local Trust Committee, CRD, FLNR, Ministry of Agriculture, North Salt Spring Waterworks District, Highland and Fernwood Water Service Commission, and Beddis Water Service Commission. The Alliance currently receives most of its funding from Islands Trust which restricts the use of the funds to coordination and facilitation.

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