



Mon Jul 30, 2001 - Updated at 02:36 PM

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Will Chrétien cave on water exports?

Remember Canada's commitment to reduce greenhouse gases evaporated under Bush pressure and economic interests

Gary Gallon

Canada has more lake area than any other country in the world, with 565 lakes larger than 100 square kilometres. There are 755,180 square kilometres of freshwater lakes and rivers.

The Great Lakes straddling the Canada-U.S. boundary contain 25 per cent of the world's freshwater in lakes, just ahead of Russia's Lake Baikal. The Great Lakes system extends more than 3,220 kilometres, has a surface area of 246,000 square kilometres.

Canada has so much water that if hundreds of supertanker loads were exported annually, it wouldn't phase the supply or the ecology of the country.

What would have an impact on the country would be the wholesale diversion of lakes and rivers to the United States to counter its shrinking water supply and its growing demand.

The Americans have treated their water like a non-renewable resource, mining and extracting it at faster and faster rates. Serious water problems are arising that if not solved will throw parts of the U.S. into serious economic difficulties.

To add to the problem, human-induced global warming is parching sections of the States as President George W. Bush sits locked in the arms of the oil and coal industries, unable to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and stave off impending droughts that may occur over the next decades.

The greatest problem is with the Ogallala Aquifer, which underlies the breadbasket of the U.S. The groundwater aquifer stretches from the Texas Panhandle, under Nebraska and Kansas, northward to South Dakota and is



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the largest single water-bearing unit in North America, covering 450,658 square kilometres, and holds enough freshwater to fill Lake Huron.

The Ogallala Aquifer has declined an average of three metres with some areas in Texas declining nearly 30 metres. There are about 200,000 wells on the Great Plains and they irrigate about 3.3 million hectares. Roughly one-fifth of all irrigated land in the U.S. is irrigated by the Ogallala. It is being pumped 14 times faster than it can be replenished. It is estimated that by the year 2020, more than 25 per cent of the aquifer reserves will be gone.

Several proposals have been made to dig a canal from Lake Superior across Canada to the U.S. Midwest for the purpose of recharging the Ogallala.

Another water hot spot is the U.S. Southwest and California. Underground aquifers, some small lakes and the Colorado River have underwritten the economic growth of Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and California. But now they've reached the end of their pipe. There is no additional water to support economic growth. In fact, the existing water supplies can't support current economic and domestic demands.

The California Department of Water Resources predicts that by 2020, California will experience water shortages of 2.4 million acre-feet (an acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons, which is a one-year supply for two typical families of four).

To the detriment of the other southwest states and Mexico (into which the Colorado River drains), in 1922, California secured a federal deal to take up to 4.4 million acre-feet of water from the Colorado River. Currently, California uses 5.2 million acre-feet from the Colorado and has been ordered to cut back.

But it can't. It is the second largest food producer in the U.S. While the Midwest provides corn, wheat, and soybean, California provides a good portion of the rest - citrus, nuts, lettuce, garlic, broccoli, onions, carrots, etc.

Instead of ordering new water efficiencies, instead of pricing the true cost of water, Bush is looking to Canada to supply all of his country's future water needs.

Given the developing drought conditions, and given the desperate food-production situation the U.S. could be in a decade from now, it is plausible that it would take the water from Canada. In the past, two huge schemes, which could be refloated, were proposed to move vast volumes of water to the U.S. One is called NAWAPA and the other "The Grand Canal."

The North American Water and Power Alliance, or NAWAPA project, was originally proposed by the California-based engineering firm, Parsons Engineering Co., and was considered by the U.S. Senate in 1964. The plan would divert water from the Yukon and Mackenzie rivers, through B.C. to the U.S. and Mexico, turning western North America into a huge water grid. Three British Columbia rivers, the Peace, the Kootenay and Columbia, would be dammed, creating a lake 800 kilometres long. The Rocky Mountain Trench straddling B.C. and the U.S. would be turned into a giant

reservoir for North America, involving 177 lakes and rivers funnelling millions of acre-feet of water into the U.S. and Mexico.

We should not forget that our NAFTA partner, Mexico, faces serious water shortages this decade and will need help from Bush to gain access to Canadian water. Some, like the Council of Canadians, feel that the free trade conditions under NAFTA will make it mandatory for Canada to send its water south.

The second scheme is the Grand Canal, which involves damming waters flowing into James Bay and reversing their flow through Quebec and Ontario to the Great Lakes at Lake Superior and then to the U.S. Proposed by Thomas Kierans of St. John's, Nfld., the project would cost \$130 billion.

The scheme was promoted in then Quebec premier Robert Bourassa's book, *Power From The North*, and was backed by AECL Ltd., the SNC Group, Bechtel Canada Ltd., Rousseau, Sauv*, Warren Inc. and UMA Engineering.

The amount of water that would be brought back - freshwater from the Grand Canal - could double the flow of water that now enters the Great Lakes.

George W. Bush wants our water bad - for the U.S. and secondarily for Mexico. And he wants a lot of it. These water diversion schemes, while apparently dead, could be dusted off. The pledges by Canadian and provincial governments not to divert water could evaporate like mist off a lake.

Remember that Canada's commitment to reduce greenhouse gases under Kyoto evaporated under Bush pressure and under Canadian parochial economic interests. Watch the same thing happen to Canada's water.

Gary Gallon is president of the Canadian Institute for Business and the Environment and was senior policy adviser to the Ontario minister of the environment, Jim Bradley from 1985 to 1990.

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