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# Licensing Groundwater in BC

*Do you use groundwater?  
Secure your water rights by  
applying today!*



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

## **Do you use water from a well or dugout (referred to as groundwater) for uses other than your own home (i.e., non-domestic purposes)?**

All irrigators, industries, waterworks and others who divert and use groundwater from a well or dugout for non-domestic purposes are required to apply for a water licence. This requirement was brought in by the *Water Sustainability Act* (WSA) on February 29, 2016.

## **What if I use water from my well in my home?**

Domestic groundwater use is exempt from licensing. This includes water for household use by the occupants of a private dwelling, fire prevention, private lawn and garden watering (up to 1,000 m<sup>2</sup>) and domestic animals. Domestic well owners are encouraged to register their well for free to make their water use known so it can be protected.

For more information visit **Domestic Use of Groundwater** at [groundwater.gov.bc.ca](http://groundwater.gov.bc.ca)

## **Existing users must apply by March 1, 2022.**

*(Existing users used groundwater on or before Feb 29, 2016)*

After this date, users who have not applied will be committing an offence under the WSA if they continue to use the water without having applied and can be subject to fines and penalties, and ordered to cease using the water.

After March 1, 2022, you will need to apply as a new applicant, your priority date will be the date of the application and your application could be refused if there is not enough water.

## **Apply today to secure your water rights.**

Groundwater licensing ensures there is a fair and transparent mechanism in place for determining who uses the water, including during shortages. A water licence is tied to your land and provides benefits to your business, including:

- A right to a specific volume of water, when available
- Protection from new users and future developments
- A fair system for managing use in times of water scarcity
- Enhancement of your property's value

## How do I secure my groundwater rights?

**Existing users** can apply until March 1, 2022. If you apply by the deadline, government will consider when you first used the water to establish your first-in-time, first-in-right (FITFIR) priority date. This gives your water use precedence over newer users when they apply, and during times of scarcity.

**New users** (use began on or after March 1, 2016) must apply for and obtain a licence *before* the water can lawfully be diverted, used or stored.

## How much does a licence cost?

The one-time application fee (minimum \$250) is waived for existing users (use began on or before February 29, 2016) who apply by March 1, 2022. Annual rentals are based on water use purpose and volume. While existing or new users are required to apply for a water licence, water fees and rentals are generally not payable for First Nations water use on Reserve or Treaty lands.

## Before You Apply:

Applications are submitted online through the FrontCounter BC website and require several pieces of information about your well and water usage. To save time during the application process:

**1. Register for a basic BCeID.** Having a BC online account (BCeID) will allow you to save your application and return to it later if you are not able to complete the application in one session. Register at [www.bceid.ca](http://www.bceid.ca) and select a basic BCeID, which is a one-step process.

**2. Gather information on your well(s)** regarding its location, depth and construction. For example:

- Search [apps.nrs.gov.bc.ca/gwells](http://apps.nrs.gov.bc.ca/gwells) to see if a record for your well exists (well identification plate number)
- Well construction reports
- Pumping records
- Pump test reports and water quality test results

**3. Gather property and water use information,** including:

- Parcel ID number (9-digit PID number on your property tax notice)

- The purpose for which the water is used
- Estimates of water use volume for each water use purpose
- If there is more than one name on your notice, they are considered a co-applicant

You can estimate agricultural water usage at [www.bcagriculturewatercalculator.ca](http://www.bcagriculturewatercalculator.ca)

#### **4. Gather evidence to show when groundwater was first used and the history of use from the well.**

If you apply by March 1, 2022, and you are an existing user, your date of precedence will be based on when groundwater use began. Evidence might include well documentation, government-issued certificates or permits, historical records or photographs, or Traditional Land Use and archaeological studies.

#### **5. Ensure you have the appropriate permits.**

If your well or any works occupy or cross Crown land you will need to have permission to use that land. Authorization can be in the form of a Permit Over Crown Land, or a more formal tenure under the *Land Act*. If you require a Crown Land authorization, but do not already have one, you will be prompted to apply as part of the water licence application process.

#### **6. Create a map of the properties where the water is used.** It should include:

- Property boundaries
- Works (well location, pumps, pipes, etc.)
- Major features (buildings, fields, etc.)
- Labels identifying all the above

[www.bcagriculturewatercalculator.ca](http://www.bcagriculturewatercalculator.ca) is a quick and easy tool for creating a map of your property.

#### **Ready to start your water licence application?**

Visit [www.groundwater.gov.bc.ca](http://www.groundwater.gov.bc.ca)

#### **Not sure if you need a licence?**

Contact FrontCounter BC at **1 877 855-3222**  
or [FrontCounterBC@gov.bc.ca](mailto:FrontCounterBC@gov.bc.ca)

**For more on the provincial water program visit**  
[www.gov.bc.ca/water](http://www.gov.bc.ca/water)

#### **Still have questions?**

Email: [Livingwatersmart@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Livingwatersmart@gov.bc.ca)