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# Metro revises water plans

BY BENJAMIN ALLDRITT, NORTH SHORE NEWS AUGUST 21, 2011

METRO Vancouver's newly approved drinking water management plan won't mean any significant changes in the Seymour or Capilano watersheds, two of the region's three sources of potable water.

Over the past decade, Metro planners have given serious thought to enlarging the Seymour dam, but the new plan calls for more work on conserving the existing supply. What additional capacity may be needed will likely be found in the Coquitlam watershed.

"There's lots of water in Coquitlam," said Metro Vancouver spokesman Bill Morrell. "Most of it's owned by Hydro but there are options for us to seek ways to acquire additional water from there.

"At Seymour, you would have to raise the dam. It's been on the table for many years, but if we can defer a very large capital expenditure then we will do that. Raising a dam has considerable economic and environmental impacts."

Metro will be encouraging residents, businesses and industry to conserve water, both through educational programs and seasonal pricing, which raises the wholesale price of water sold to municipalities. So far, said Morrell, communities have decided not to pass that 25 per cent summer increase on to consumers.

"Now is when you need to be mindful of using water wisely," he said. "The blessing and the curse of our system is that water is very, very cheap. But the systems we use to capture, treat and convey it are large and complex and expensive and so the more we can defer those capital expenditures, the better it will be for everyone."

Planners had also expressed worry in previous years that climate change may play havoc with water levels in the three watersheds. The new plan doesn't contain the same urgent language, but Morrell stressed that climate change is still on Metro's radar.

"It's still a factor," he said. "It's one of those unknowns. What is the impact? It's not so much more or less volumes of water falling, but when it falls and where, and whether it's snow or rain."

Studying trends in precipitation will be one of the tasks of a planned watershed academy in the Lower Seymour watershed. Metro has a series of academies planned around the region, including the nearly complete wastewater academy on Annacis Island. Parks and drinking water academies are also planned.

While Morrell said there is no firm timetable for the Seymour academy, it is the next on the list after Annacis is complete.

"These will be centres of expertise that will allow significant amounts of research to be done at a high academic level as well as providing for public education," he said.

Work is also continuing on figuring out whether or not the North Shore dams could be used to generate hydroelectric power. A joint water use plan is being developed by Metro, the province, and various other user groups. The plan is expected in early 2012.

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