

Province seeks comment on water regulations

[William Stodalka](#) / Alaska Highway News

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British Columbia residents have until Tuesday to submit comments about new water regulations that could affect the Site C dam and water used for hydraulic fracturing.

Last July, the province began seeking public opinions on the Water Sustainability Act, a piece of legislation that governs water use. It would also allow the government to implement groundwater regulations.

This act was first passed in 2014, but the regulations aren't set to come into force until next year, and will cover groundwater licensing, groundwater protection, dam safety, and fines and regulations around water use and pollution.

Part of the rules regarding dams would affect Site C.

"Once constructed, the operation and maintenance of Site C (like BC Hydro's existing hydroelectric facilities) would be subject to the dam safety regulation," said David Karn, a Ministry of Environment spokesman.

People with water wells would also be part of these new regulations.

Part of the new rules mean that irrigators, industries, waterworks, and other groups who use groundwater for non-household uses would be required to get a water licence and start paying fees for the first time.

Under the new legislation, users can drill a water well without a licence, but they can't use that water for non-household uses without first obtaining a licence.

Homeowners will be treated differently, however. Residents who use water wells for household use aren't expected to pay water fees and rentals, and homeowners won't be required to obtain a licence. Households would have a right of up to 2,000 litres per day for domestic wells.

The regulations would also make it possible to licence domestic use in areas of the province where there are water shortages or conflicts.

Comments will be accepted until Tuesday at engage.gov.bc.ca/watersustainabilityact.

reporter@ahnfsj.ca