

# NWT Water Stewardship Strategy

---

*Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger  
Thursday, May 20, 2010  
16th Legislative Assembly*

Mr. Speaker for many years, going back to the last century, Northerners have increasingly voiced their concerns about water and all the things affecting water. The message to us has been clear. We must take the steps necessary to protect our water.

The 15th Assembly heard the people and shared their concern. In 2007, the 15th Legislative Assembly declared in part that, “all people have a fundamental human right to water”.

The 16th Legislative Assembly built on that motion and directed that a made-in-the NWT Water Strategy was a priority and needed to be developed. For the last 28 months, we along with our many partners have worked long and hard to carry out that direction. Today I stand before you to report that our made-in-the north strategy, Northern Voices, Northern Water, is ready and I will be tabling it later today.

Our concern about water is greater than ever as we deal with climate change, transboundary issues and the many pressures within our borders. This strategy is a critical policy document that allows us to move forward immediately. There will be no resting on our laurels. There is no time as events affecting our water are moving too fast.

Northern Voices, Northern Waters provides our policy base and road map as we move forward with transboundary discussions under the Mackenzie River Basin Board Transboundary Master Agreement. We also have much work to do within our own boundaries.

This Strategy is a collaborative approach to responsible water stewardship. It was developed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, designated representatives of Aboriginal governments and active input from NWT residents.

The GNWT greatly appreciates the contributions of the Aboriginal Steering Committee for their guidance in the development of the Strategy. The Steering Committee will continue to offer its advice as the Strategy is implemented. NWT residents will continue to have opportunities to engage on this “living” Strategy.

The Strategy promotes an ecosystem-based approach within watersheds to improve water management to reflect the deep and fundamental relationship between residents and the waters of the Northwest Territories.

As one of our most valuable resources, we recognize the importance of clean waters and healthy aquatic ecosystems. The Strategy sets a common path forward for water partners to ensure the continued sustainable use of this resource. It will improve decision-making processes, information sharing and communications among all water partners actively involved in water stewardship in the Northwest Territories.

The goals of the Strategy are to ensure: that the waters that flow into, within or through the NWT are not substantially altered in quality, quantity and rates of flow; that residents have access to safe, clean and plentiful drinking water at all times; that aquatic ecosystems are healthy and diverse; that residents can rely on their water to sustain their communities and economies; that residents are involved in and knowledgeable about water stewardship; and finally, that all those making water stewardship decisions work together to communicate and share information.

Mr. Speaker, the time to act on water stewardship is now. As Aboriginal governments raise awareness through annual water gatherings, pressures on waters throughout the NWT and in neighbouring jurisdictions continue to increase. NWT residents have expressed concern about water levels, water quality, and the health of our aquatic ecosystems. Many have witnessed differences in river flow and levels, and worry about the future of our wetlands, deltas, rivers and lakes.

Upstream development in the Mackenzie River Basin, including hydro, nuclear and oil sands development have or may have an impact on our aquatic ecosystems. In northeastern British Columbia, the Bennett Dam has already altered river flows. BC Hydro has recently proposed a 900 megawatt project to develop Site C, the third dam on the Peace River, which may continue to modify flows. Downstream Aboriginal Governments have indicated concern over even slight additional alterations.

In Alberta, TransAlta continues to gather information to develop a hydroelectric project for a 100 megawatt facility and a four-reactor 4,000 megawatt nuclear power plant on the Peace River. In the Great Slave sub-basin of the Mackenzie River Basin a proposal for a Slave River Hydro Development near the NWT border is being investigated. Oil sands development continues in the Athabasca sub-basin of the Mackenzie River Basin.

The Strategy will help us prepare for negotiations with other governments within the Mackenzie River Basin to ensure its aquatic and plant life continue to thrive.

As partners, we must show strong leadership in water stewardship to ensure the sustainable use of this valuable resource throughout the NWT. We must set high standards and hold ourselves and others responsible and accountable. We cannot sit back and watch as our water resources deplete or become contaminated. We must properly manage our waters so future generations can enjoy what we currently enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, our Strategy relies on the principles of an ecosystem-based approach within watersheds. When water flows downstream the land mass where that water flows

becomes increasingly larger. Decisions on how the waters within these watersheds are used have the potential to affect many ecosystems.

These decisions cannot be made in isolation. Decisions and subsequent actions must be made after considering the entire watershed, its land and water, and all the values within it.

This ecosystem-based approach allows for the protection of the water environment while addressing critical issues such as the current and future impacts of development and climate change.

Together with our water partners, we have already accomplished a significant amount of work in the area of environmental monitoring, research and planning at all levels in the Northwest Territories.

As we actively plan for the future of water management in the NWT, we will build on the work to date. Water partners continue to examine available information and use it to make sound decisions that will provide a healthy water legacy for future generations.

Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity to lead by example. By using our collective voice on water issues, partnering with Aboriginal governments and setting high standards, we hold ourselves and others accountable for the establishment of sound and effective water management policies. The next step in this process is to develop a detailed action plan for fall 2010.

This Plan will be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure all concerns and important details are included.

Our water resources are precious and this Strategy is our guide to engagement in the development of current and future water projects, including the Site C and the Slave River Hydro Dams and ensures we can keep our waters clean, abundant and productive for all time.

Mahsi Cho.