

# Why Rossland Needs a Watershed Management Plan

## Committee for Responsible Development

### Position Paper

Submitted to Rossland City Council and Staff

April 14, 2008

#### THE PRESENT

“The citizens of Rossland obviously value clean drinking water and don’t want it impacted by anything. People have raised the issue of a resort development proposed within the drinking watershed boundaries. I think it is wise to listen to their concerns, given that developments in watersheds often have negative impacts on the environment.”

Fin Donnelly

Executive Director, Rivershed Society of British Columbia.

Councillor, City of Coquitlan

April, 2008

As Mr. Donnelly indicates, developments in watersheds are a widespread concern. We need look no further than the base of Red Resort to confirm that development can and does negatively impact the environment regardless of good intentions. Development is complex. Accidents can and do happen. It has already happened here.

“We’ve always had plenty of water in Rossland. Why the concern?”

Long time Rossland resident

April 2008

In addition to potential increased water demand from new development, we are faced with a changing climate. The 2007 Columbia Basin Trust publication “Climate Change in the Canadian Columbia Basin” notes “A warmer climate and lower summer precipitation caused longer periods of low flow and lower flows at the end of the summer.” “Hydrological models of stream flow at Waneta and Mica dams also indicate a shift to earlier runoff and late summer reductions in stream flow.” The past is not necessarily the future when it comes to water. Rossland needs to consider this in water capacity planning. Rossland needs to do this now, before making water use decision that will have lasting impact.

## BACKGROUND

In March 2002, Dobson Engineering Ltd and Urban Systems developed a draft Watershed Management Plan for the City of Rossland. More than six years later, this document remains a draft.

The January 2006 Official Community Plan states as a part of Land Use Strategy, “Given that the supply of Rossland’s water is generally within the municipal boundaries, the City has an excellent opportunity to control the use of the watersheds. Given the importance of the long-term vitality of these areas, a special study should be undertaken. Such a study could be in the form of a Watershed Management Plan.”

The need for a watershed management plan was again identified in the Strategic Sustainability Plan. Most recently the Oceans, Habitat and Enhancement Branch wrote the City on December 12, 2007: “Consequently we strongly recommend that a water management plan be developed for this watershed as soon as possible.” The watershed referred to was Topping Creek.

The Committee for Responsible Development believes that a comprehensive Watershed Management Plan is an essential, and long overdue, step to preserve the quality and quantity of Rossland’s drinking water.

## CURRENT SITUATION

In a public meeting on February 12, 2008, Red Mountain Ventures presented their plan for The Golf Club at Red Mountain. Fifty percent (50%) of the development was proposed for land in the City’s Topping Creek Watershed. RMV’s water consultant, Associated Engineering, reported that sufficient water was available from the City’s three active watersheds (Hanna, Murphy and Topping) to meet City requirements for approximately 30 years based on current water use patterns. The report did point out that the capacity and potential water yield of the City’s three watersheds had not been confirmed by flow monitoring, either by Associated Engineering or previously by others. No analysis was made on the adequacy of the City watersheds to supply future needs. Future needs = current demand+previously authorized large-scale development+core population growth+golf course irrigation+golf course residential development.

The Committee has reviewed all available historical watershed data from past City studies as well as Environment Canada data on area stream flows. The analysis indicates that there is no factual data on the capacity of Rossland’s watershed, only estimates. The population growth data in the OCP has not been updated since 1991.

No estimates of how climate change will impact the timing and flow of water from Rossland's watershed have been made.

In summary, there are no reliable estimates of Rossland's future water needs. There are no reliable estimates of Rossland watershed capacity. There is a complete absence of data to support ANY decision committing water capacity to new development.

#### WHAT STEPS SHOULD COUNCIL CONSIDER?

The closing paragraph in the April 11, 2008 online edition of Rossland/Trail News article on the recent Planning and Development Committee meeting reads: "Red Mountain has not yet applied to get formal approval from the city. According to (Mayor) Smith, until the application is actually filed the city has done everything they can do on the issue."

In fact, the City has not done everything they can do. The Committee respectfully suggests that the following actions are appropriate:

1. Increase protection for Rossland's watershed by immediately revising existing Bylaws and creating new Bylaws as necessary to:
  - Extend the boundaries of the Topping Creek Environmentally Sensitive Development Permit Area to include the entire Topping Creek watershed.
  - Prohibit, in perpetuity, development in the R-LDR section of Red Resort beyond the currently authorized 100 equivalent units.
  - Prohibit, in perpetuity, any land uses in that portion of the R-MA and R-LDR sections of Red Resort that lie within Topping Creek watershed beyond those currently authorized.
  - Revise RR-1 zoning to prohibit any new use or development not consistent with the current OCP's stated intent to "protect the integrity of the Rossland Watershed and associated environmental features"
  - Revise the R-MA and R-LDR zoning in the area to the west of Blue-Eyed Swamp to incorporate R-OS designation (parks/trails/open space) along Topping Creek and its tributaries.
  - Incorporate these Bylaws in the OCP.
  
2. Immediately initiate a comprehensive hydrologic survey of the Rossland watershed by independent professional experts qualified and licensed to perform such investigations. The survey should include actual water flow data from Hanna, Murphy, Topping and Little Sheep Creek sub watersheds and other sub watersheds deemed appropriate by City staff. The water flow data should quantify the timing and seasonal variation of water yield from each sub watershed. Consult with experts on climate change in the Columbia Basin to model how water yield and timing may change in the foreseeable future. This survey would provide data on the present capacity of Rossland's watershed and estimate how climate change will impact the capacity in the future.

3. Create a water demand database using current demand, population and demographic trends and all development needs currently authorized. This Database would form the baseline demand for evaluating adequacy of current supply and determining the capacity of the watershed for additional development.
4. Create a comprehensive Watershed Resource Management Plan, incorporating the results of the new hydrologic survey, together with capacity and demand data. The content of the Plan and its review and approval should be in accordance with The Water Act (RSBC 1996, Chapter 483.)
5. Incorporate the Watershed Resource Management Plan in the Official Community Plan.
6. Defer decisions on development applications with significant watershed issues Until the above five actions are completed.
7. Immediately curtail City financing of developers' share of infrastructure expenditures. Institute a policy requiring that developers pay their share in advance and as a condition of development permit approval. This is to preserve the City's limited borrowing capacity for infrastructure needs of the community.

#### ABOUT THE COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT

The Committee was created to support solutions for sustainable development in Rossland. We seek to educate, inform and engage the community in deciding critical issues. We seek open and transparent communication with all stakeholders, including developers.

The Committee focus:

- Supporting sustainable organic growth that provides lasting economic development in the local community and region
- Protecting irreplaceable community resources such as the watershed that make sustainable growth possible.
- Supporting the implementation of the Vision to Action process as reflected in the Strategic Sustainability Plan.
- Supporting long-range public financial policy and planning that facilitates responsible development and fairly apportions costs among all stakeholders.

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More information at the Committee web site: [www.rosslandbc.org](http://www.rosslandbc.org)