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CANADA'S WATER

(Reproduced from Water by W.V. Morris, a booklet published by the Public Relations & Information Services, Department of Energy, Mines & Resources.)

In terms of fresh surface water, Canada is one of the world's most fortunate countries. There are probably more lakes here than in any other country in the world, so many that they have not even been counted, much less measured. Estimates, however, have placed Canada's total lake area at 292,000 square miles. Since the country's total area is 3,852,000 square miles, this means that about 7.6 per cent of Canada is covered by fresh water. Most of Canada's lakes have not yet been surveyed but, including Canada's share of the Great Lakes, they contain as much as one seventh of the world's fresh, liquid, surface water.

Streamflow is the true measure of water supply

Not all the stored water in Canada's lakes is available for use. It would be unrealistic to suggest, for instance, that the entire 5,500 cubic miles of water in the Great Lakes, of which an estimated 1,800 cubic miles is in Canada, could be removed and used. The water is very valuable where it is, as storage which can be drawn upon in time of drought to be replaced in time of plenty. But the true measure of a country's water supply is in its streamflow rather than in its storage capacity.

Not all of Canada's rivers have been gauged but, based on actual measurements where these are available, supplemented by estimates for ungauged areas, it has been estimated that the combined average flow of all Canada's rivers is about 3.5 million cubic feet per second.

This means that each year, on the average, Canada's rivers carry about 750 cubic miles of water to the oceans, almost 9 per cent of the total flow of all the rivers of the world. Set against a population which is less than one per cent of the world's population, Canada's endowment of fresh water is generous indeed.

Even though the flow is not uniformly distributed throughout the country, nor during the year (a large portion of the annual supply for example, is frozen for several months during the winter, to be released only when Spring