



CANADA

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CLEAN WATER - A NATIONAL PRIORITY FOR CANADA

Mr. John N. Turner, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, recently addressed the First Paper Industry Conference on Water Conservation and Stream Improvement at Fort William, Ontario. The following is a partial text of his remarks:

...As far as our total water supply is concerned, we are one of the most fortunate nations on earth. The total flow of all our rivers has been estimated at about 2.5 million cubic feet per second, which is equivalent to about 70,000 gallons per day for every person in Canada. Just compare this with our nearest neighbour, the United States, whose total river flow amounts to about 1.8 million cubic feet per second, which is only a little more than 5,000 gallons per day for each person in the country. And even at that, the United States is fortunate compared with some other nations in the world.

It is true that many of our Canadian rivers flow through relatively unpopulated territory, and are not of much use unless we can divert them to where they can be used. But the important fact is that we have the water.

I am not suggesting for onemoment that we should complacently look at these calculations and feel that we have nothing to worry about.

Population is not fixed. It is continually increasing, and as it increases, the *per capita* use of water also increases; expanding industrial activity, added to an increasing domestic and municipal demand, keep forcing our total use closer and closer to the fixed amount supplied by nature.

As demand approaches supply, there are only two alternatives open to us - new sources of water, or a more effective use and re-use of the water we already have.

Both these alternatives are still open to us in Canada. We are looking carefully at possible diversions south from rivers which now flow unused northward to the Arctic Ocean.

JOINT STUDY PROPOSED

It was the Federal Government last year that proposed to the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec that we engage in feasibility studies of diversion of our northern rivers back into the Great Lakes system. Ontario has now agreed and we have inaugurated a joint study. I hope that the Province of Quebec will also see fit to join us. I am sure that some of these possibilities will some day become realities. But the availability of this fresh supply must not deter us from looking carefully also at the rivers which already flow through our populated areas, and making sure that their waters are used wisely. Waste of this most vital resource is inexcusable....

There are very few industries which do not use water in quantity, and there are likewise very few industries which do not have wastes to dispose of. Water is a very convenient carrier of waste products, and waste disposal is one of the most important uses of water. Every stream has a natural ability to cleanse itself when it is given a load of waste to carry. But there is a limit, and on many of our streams that limit has been reached. A stream must travel a certain distance before it can recover from the effects of receiving a quantity of waste material, and some materials it cannot cope with at all. As industries multiply in number, and municipalities increase in size, many of our streams have no chance to recover before being charged with a new load of effluent material, so that recovery never occurs, and the stream becomes a permanent sewer.