

Private well owners have issues

Parksville Qualicum News

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Several residential well owners are expressing great concern over the reduction in volume of water in their wells.

The recent dry year has had an impact on their water supply. Despite this, most of these people point out that this reduction is not new, but has been a trend over the last several years. One well-owner described how his volume of water started at seven gallons/minute but is now half that, running at only three to four gallons/minute. He has to be very careful to avoid going dry each year.

All of those interviewed are on shallow wells, and some might suggest the answer to less water is to dig deeper. The possibility of this solution depends on where the residence is in relation to the aquifers and the flow of groundwater. In some cases a deeper well might work, but without mapping we do not know exactly where the aquifers are, or how deep they sit, or how healthy they are.

Another factor is the number of other wells that are nearby. Aquifers can provide only a limited supply of water, especially since many seem to be declining. Each well into an aquifer is like a straw into a glass of water that is fed by a slow drip. If you put too many straws into the glass and draw on them at once, at some point the amount into each straw will decrease. Also, if you draw down the glass too fast, before the drip can re-fill it, eventually the glass empties.

Water quality is another issue, but difficult to discuss as many of those interviewed do not test their wells. Some did say they buy drinking water because they are too close to their neighbours who use pesticides, fertilizers and/or septic tanks.

The concern with these latter factors is that groundwater moves very slowly, beneath one property to the next on its way to the ocean. People are

concerned about how their neighbours manage their land and impact the water quality for those around them.

Asked what issues we need to manage in order to address our water supply, the well owners have plenty to say.

Questions are varied. Some want to know more about the impacts of climate change on our water, compared to a natural long term cycle of dry and wet years.

Growth is repeated by most as an issue, describing how they have seen their water supply decrease as the number of people in their area has gone up.

Dianna Morgeau of Errington sums it up when she says, "if there are more people it makes sense that there would be more using the water and the water table would go down."

Other issues include a lack of understanding in the community about how our water supply really works, and a lack of incentives for homeowners and business.

Grey areas regarding water management in our growth strategy and official community plans are also listed as issues, as are both gaps and overlaps in government jurisdiction, policy and regulations.

A variety of solutions have been offered by those interviewed including funding to help home and business owners collect rainwater, and retrofit their operations. Some suggest we require all developers to produce water conserving buildings.

Others say we should copy California and require developers to retrofit surrounding homes in order to absorb the increase in water users. Still others want to know more about the carrying capacity of the region.

Despite the variety of ideas, the consensus is a change in behaviour is part of the solution for everyone.

In our next article we'll look at how these well owners are adapting to a decrease in volume.

This series of Water Limited will explore community perspectives on our water supply based on identical questions asked of each interviewee. Articles are written by Michele Deakin, but are not necessarily an endorsement of ideas and views expressed by those interviewed.

Mid Vancouver Island Habitat Enhancement Society (MVIHES) coordinates the Englishman River Watershed Recovery Plan, and conducts education, restoration and monitoring projects throughout the mid island area. MVIHES also works to support healthy watersheds and shorelines, and continuity of our biodiversity as a way to contribute to protection and conservation of salmon habitat.

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