



MARG SEREGELY

NDCA's Source Water Protection co-ordinator Judy Sewell and water resources engineer Javeed Khan examine the landscape around the Stobie Dam for any potential contamination threats.

Protecting Greater Sudbury's source water

Sudbury's landscape is abundant with many interconnected lakes, streams, rivers and aquifers. When it comes to healthy water, it's hard to believe that we will ever have any drinking water quality and quantity problems. However, in recent years, outbreaks of waterborne diseases in Walkerton, Ont., have demonstrated how easily water can become contaminated and how damaging the consequences can be.

Following the Walkerton inquiry, Justice Dennis O'Connor made 100 recommendations on how to protect drinking water. The first recommendations dealt with water treatment and distribution systems and the remainder covered source water protection and deal with the quality of the water as it enters the municipal treatment system.

The proposed Source Water Protection Clean Water Act, Bill 43 was introduced by the Minister of the Environment, Laurel Broten on December 5, 2005 and is now going into the second reading phase. The proposed Clean Water Act is designed to protect existing and future sources of drinking water from activities that are determined to be a significant drinking water threat.

Source water is untreated water from streams, lakes, or underground aquifers that people use to supply public and private drinking water systems and wells. Source water comes from one of two sources: surface water or groundwater.

"Everyone has a right to clean water. It is a priceless resource and we all have a responsibility to protect it," said Broten. "To keep our drinking water clean, we need to keep pollution from seeping into our streams, lakes and rivers."

Activities that are determined to be a significant threat to sources of drinking water come from human land use activities that occur in both urban and rural areas and include: industrial discharges, municipal wastewater effluents, landfill site leachate, septic systems, leaking underground oil and gas storage tanks, wastes from existing and abandoned mining sites, pesticides and fertilizers, urban runoff, boats, acid rain and automobiles.

Protecting sources of drinking water will be done on a watershed basis. A watershed is an area of land that drains into a source of water. Decisions about water must be made on a watershed basis that is uniquely tailored to each community.

Nickel District Conservation Authority (NDCA), along with other conservation authorities across Ontario, was chosen by the Ministry of the Environment to co-ordinate the development of local source water protection committees, watershed assessment reports and source water protection plans. A local plan will contain policies to protect sources of drinking water and rules regarding land use activities that may be banned or allowed with conditions.

The NDCA source water protection planning area encompasses the entire Vermilion, the Wahnapiatae and the Whitefish River Watersheds. All the municipal drinking water originates in the Vermilion and the Wahnapiatae watersheds. And there are private wells and private intakes from lakes and rivers throughout the three watersheds.

The source water protection committee will have representatives from a cross-section of stakeholders.

"We will be bringing together local stakeholders from various sectors of the community in the source water protection planning process," said Jennifer Salo, NDCA Source Water Protection communications specialist. "In order for a source water protection plan to be successful it needs to be owned and supported by the people living in the watershed."

Working groups and sub-committees will also be established and committee activities will be open and transparent.

"Keep a lookout for future advertisements for public open houses, meetings and public hearings on local source water protection planning endeavors," Salo said.

To learn more about source water protection, contact Jennifer Salo at 674-5249.

Article provided by the Nickel District Conservation Authority.