

## **B.C. study: strong public support for new water protection laws**

### **87% say local communities should have a greater say in decisions affecting fresh water**

**FEBRUARY 26, 2014, Vancouver, B.C.** – A public opinion study released today by the Real Estate Foundation of BC and Vancouver Foundation found that only 38 per cent of respondents say that current water use in their region is sustainable. Three in four British Columbians (76%) believe that if nothing is done to improve the management of water resources, it will become a serious problem in the next 10 years.

These results are framed by a finding that 95 per cent of British Columbians view the quality and abundance of fresh water as vitally or highly important to health and well-being in their region. Nine in ten (93%) say that water is B.C.'s most precious resource.

Conducted last year to assess public attitudes toward freshwater issues in British Columbia, study results signal that British Columbians are starting to pay attention to freshwater issues in the province.

"The findings of this study clearly show that British Columbians are ready for the government to follow through on the recent Throne Speech promise to enact a strong *Water Sustainability Act*," says Oliver Brandes of the POLIS Project at the University of Victoria, a co-lead in the design of the study. "It also confirms that the public sees local community direction and involvement in decision-making as a critical element in a modern water management regime. But that this does not provide an excuse for downloading responsibilities; government at all levels must remain active and involved."

The study shows public support for greater *local control* over the management of freshwater resources, suggesting that expectations of the role of government are changing. Eighty-seven per cent of respondents agree that, subject to strict environmental standards, local communities should have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' to decisions affecting their fresh water. Fewer than two in ten respondents (19%) agree that adopting stricter rules for protecting our fresh water will harm our economy.

While there is widespread belief that local communities deserve to have a greater say in decisions, the study also found solid consensus around the need for provincial and federal governments to provide critical regulation, and undertake scientific research and monitoring. Almost nine in ten respondents (89%) favour strict province-wide rules and standards for water protection and 87 per cent say that the provincial government should play the lead or major role in funding water monitoring.

"Fresh water is a priority issue for the Real Estate Foundation because of the vital link between healthy watersheds, and healthy landscapes and communities," said Jack Wong, CEO of the Real Estate Foundation of BC. "By governing and managing freshwater resources well, our province has a better chance of ensuring abundant, clean water for ourselves and the natural world that supports us."

"The importance of this study is that it shows how fresh water is of fundamental importance to the well-being of communities across the province and it also demonstrates the public's appetite for strong water laws and increased community engagement," says Kevin McCort, President and CEO of Vancouver Foundation. "Vancouver Foundation supports the government's proposal to enable local watershed governance in its new water legislation to build on local knowledge and expertise, recognize First

Nations rights and title, and support proactive community watershed planning.”

When asked how governments should update the rules for protecting and managing fresh water, 87 per cent of respondents believe that ensuring the protection of nature and natural ecosystems should be a top priority, and three in four (77%) are strongly in favour of requiring any business that damages or pollutes a watershed to pay into a local freshwater protection fund.

“A new *Water Sustainability Act* would be the first major reform in water law and policy for over 100 years, so we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to secure B.C.’s water future,” says Brandes. “Unlike so many issues that divide us, this study shows that fresh water unites British Columbians and an unusually broad-based public consensus supports taking strong action to protect our precious water resources.”

“It’s actually a really exciting opportunity because, with support from the Province, there are many communities and partners that are ready to help B.C. make great strides forward in freshwater stewardship,” says Jack Wong.

- 30 -

#### **About the Real Estate Foundation of BC:**

The Real Estate Foundation of BC is a philanthropic organization that helps advance sustainable land use in British Columbia. It provides grants to non-profit organizations working to improve B.C. communities and natural environments through responsible and informed land use, conservation and real estate practices. Its funding programs support research, education, and law and policy reform. Since 1988, the Foundation has approved more than \$65 million in grants. Learn more at [www.refbc.com](http://www.refbc.com).

#### **About Vancouver Foundation:**

With almost 1,500 funds and assets totaling \$814 million, Vancouver Foundation is Canada’s largest community foundation. In 2012, Vancouver Foundation and its donors made more than 4,000 grants, totaling approximately \$46 million to registered charities across Canada. Since it was founded in 1943, Vancouver Foundation, in partnership with its donors, has distributed more than \$917 million to thousands of community projects and programs. Grant recipients range from social services to medical research groups, to organizations devoted to arts and culture, the environment, education, children and families, disability supports for employment, youth issues and animal welfare. To find out more visit: [vancouverfoundation.ca](http://vancouverfoundation.ca) or follow us on social media: [Facebook.com/vancouverfdn](https://Facebook.com/vancouverfdn) or [@VancouverFdn](https://Twitter.com/VancouverFdn).

#### **Contact:**

Celina Owen  
Real Estate Foundation of BC  
604.343.2623 | toll free 1.866.912.6800 ext. 103  
[celina@refbc.com](mailto:celina@refbc.com)