

Groundwater Licensing

Questions and Answers

On February 29, 2016 the [Water Sustainability Act](#) was brought into force to modernize B.C.'s water legislation and respond to population growth and increasing demands on our water resources.

For the first time, non-domestic groundwater users are **legally required** to apply for a water licence. B.C. is in a transition period where all non-domestic groundwater users must apply for a licence by **March 1, 2022**.

The Province is reaching out to the public to promote groundwater licensing and spread awareness of the new requirements.

The Province is mailing notices to possible groundwater users and launched an advertising campaign in fall 2019.

Contact FrontCounter BC (1-877-855-3222) for more information.



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General

1. Am I Using Groundwater?

Groundwater means water naturally occurring below the surface of the ground. If you use water from a well or dugout, then you are a groundwater user. This includes all irrigators, industries, waterworks and others who divert and use water from a well or dugout.

2. What is a Water Licence?

A water licence is issued by the B.C. government and allows groundwater users to divert, use, or store groundwater from an aquifer and construct works to do so. It specifies:


- Works associated with the water use
- Location the water can be used
- Maximum quantity of water that may be used
- Water source
- Water use purpose

3. Why is the Government Licensing Groundwater?


Water is a precious resource, but it's also a limited resource. As B.C. continues to grow, we are experiencing increasing pressure on rivers, lakes and aquifers, and we are facing increasingly severe droughts and less water available for people and businesses.

Groundwater licensing ensures there is a fair and transparent mechanism in place for determining who uses the water, including during shortages. Groundwater licensing helps protect aquifers and streams as well as the businesses and livelihoods that depend on reliable access to groundwater.

4. Do I Need a Water Licence?



Non-Domestic/Non-Household Use
<p>You need a water licence if you use groundwater from a well or dugout for anything other than household (domestic) purposes.</p> <p>This includes rural businesses, irrigators, industries, waterworks, and others who divert or use groundwater from a well or a dugout for non-domestic purposes.</p>



Domestic/Household Use
<p>You do not need a licence if you use groundwater from your own well or dugout for domestic purposes including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using water for a private dwelling household; • fire prevention; • private lawn and garden watering (up to 1,000m² or ¼ acre); and • domestic animals.

Domestic groundwater users are encouraged to **register their well for free** to protect their water rights in times of scarcity. Register your well at groundwater.gov.bc.ca.




5. Am I a New or Existing User?

New User	Existing User
Your well or dugout groundwater use began after February 29, 2016.	Your well or dugout groundwater use began before March 1, 2016.
<i>Apply online under</i>	<i>Apply online under</i>
Groundwater New Use	Groundwater Existing Use

6. Why Should I Apply?

You are **legally required** to submit a licence application by **March 1, 2022** if you are using groundwater from a well or dugout for non-domestic uses on your property. You must apply for and obtain a licence before the water can be lawfully diverted, used or stored.

There are also many benefits of having a water licence tied to your land:

Benefits of Applying for a Water License	
<p><i>Rights and Law</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Secure your water rights: a licence grants you rights and the legal authority to use groundwater ✓ Your water right will be protected in times of scarcity ✓ You will be complying with the <i>Water Sustainability Act</i>
<p><i>Business Benefits</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enhances the value of your property ✓ Grants you a right to a specific water volume to support your business ✓ Protects your water use from new users and future development ✓ A fair and transparent system for managing water during shortages
<p><i>Water Protection</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Helps protect water resources for the benefit of all British Columbians ✓ Helps ensure sustainable management of your water supply

Existing Users (*began use before March 1, 2016*) can also benefit by:

- ✓ having their historic groundwater use recognized; and
- ✓ establishing their *first-in-time, first-in-right* (FITFIR) priority date based on considerations of when they first used your water.

7. What if I Miss the Deadline?

After **March 1, 2022**, users who have not applied will be committing an offence under the *Water Sustainability Act* if they continue using water and their water rights will not be secured. They may be subject to fines and penalties and may be ordered to cease using water.




Existing Users (*began use before March 1, 2016*) will need to apply as a **New User**; their priority date will be the date of the application and their application could be refused if there is not enough water.

Applying for a Licence

8. How do I Apply?

Applications are submitted online at groundwater.gov.bc.ca under the option that best suits you: **Groundwater New Use, Groundwater Existing Use, or Domestic Use of Groundwater.**

Secure Your Water Rights Today
The *Water Sustainability Act* now requires that non-domestic users of groundwater obtain an authorization.

<div style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Groundwater New Use After February 29, 2016 </div> <p style="font-size: small;">Commercial, industrial, or agricultural use of groundwater that began after February 29, 2016.</p>  <div style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Apply Now</div>	<div style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Groundwater Existing Use Before March 1, 2016 </div> <p style="font-size: small;">Commercial, industrial, or agricultural use of groundwater that began before March 1, 2016.</p>  <div style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Apply Now</div>	<div style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> Domestic Use of Groundwater </div> <p style="font-size: small;">Using groundwater for domestic use in a private home. Does not require a licence, but you are encouraged to register your well.</p>  <div style="background-color: #003366; color: white; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Register Now</div>
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9. What Do I Need Before I Apply?

You will need information and evidence about your well and water usage to complete the application. A **complete list of information** that most applicants will need is available online:

www.frontcounterbc.gov.bc.ca/pdf/EUGW-Checklist.docx

Save time by collecting this commonly requested information before you apply:

- Well and water source information
- Well construction reports
- Pumping Records
- Pump test reports and water quality test results
- Property and water use information
- Maps of where your water is used
- Evidence of when you began your water usage
- Evidence of any permits or authorizations you may have

Register for a basic BCeID (online account) so you can save your application and return to it later. Register in one step by visiting www.bceid.ca and selecting "basic BCeID".

Search apps.nrs.gov.bc.ca/gwells to see if a record for your well exists (well identification plate number).



10. How Much Does a Licence Cost?

There is a one-time application fee (minimum \$250) that is processed at the end of your online application. This fee is waived for **Existing Users** (*began use before March 1, 2016*) who apply before the **March 1, 2022 deadline**.

You are required to pay **annual rentals** retroactive to February 29, 2016 when the *Water Sustainability Act* came into force. Annual rentals depend on your water use purpose and the quantity used.

Use this online rental estimator to determine how much water rental may be payable:
www.env.gov.bc.ca/wsd/water_rights/water_rental_rates/calculator/

Exemptions from Fees and Rentals

Application fees and annual rentals are not required from:

- First Nations using water on reserve land;
- an exempt person or entity under a First Nations treaty final agreement;
- a person or entity that is exempt under the Nisga'a Final Agreement;
- Provincial or federal ministries; or
- for approvals, change approvals and permits that are processed by the B.C. Oil and Gas Commission.

11. What Happens After I Apply?

Your application will go through a process before any decision is made about whether the water licence will be granted.

Step 1) FrontCounter BC Receives your Application

- They will process your payment and review any documents you might mail or bring to one of the FrontCounter BC offices.
- If more information is required, they will contact you.
- Your application will not proceed until all required information is received.

Step 2) Consultations and Referrals

- Applications may be referred to other provincial and federal regulatory agencies for comment.
- Consultation with First Nations, other water users, community groups or other parties may be required if existing rights could be affected by your application.

Step 3) Technical Review

- You may be asked to provide additional information if it is needed.
- A recommendation will be made for the consideration of a statutory decision maker, normally a Water Manager, who is authorized under legislation to grant a water licence.

Step 4) Decision

- A Water Manager will decide whether to approve your application.
- You will be informed of the decision.

Help Applying

12. Who Can Help Me Apply?

Contact FrontCounter BC to learn about your options or get help. We recommend calling before going to an office to get help with your application.

FrontCounter BC staff will help you collect necessary information to bring with you to an appointment so you can have the best chance of success in submitting a complete application.

Questions? Need Help?

FrontCounter BC

Toll Free: 1-877-855-3222

E-mail: FrontCounterBC@gov.bc.ca

13. Useful Links

Applying Online

- Online application: groundwater.gov.bc.ca
- Register for a [basic BCeID](#) (online account)

Collecting Information

- Well data search: <https://apps.nrs.gov.bc.ca/gwells/>
- [Complete list of information](#) that most applicants will require
- Descriptions of [water use purposes](#)
- [B.C. Agriculture Water Calculator](#) to estimate your crop irrigation or livestock water needs
- Help drawing or making maps:
 - [Application Drawing Standards](#)
 - FrontCounter BC [Mapping Tool](#)
- [Joint Works Agreement](#), if you share or are connected to another person's works

More Information about Licensing

- [Groundwater Licensing process](#)
- [New Requirements for Groundwater Users](#)
- [Annual Rental Estimator](#)

Other

- [Water Sustainability Act](#)
- [Water Sustainability Regulation](#)