BACKGROUNDER

Fresh Water, Sovereignty and Security: What British Columbians Think

Results of the 2026 Watershed Security survey, with tracking to 2018 · Prepared by McAllister Opinion Research for the BC Watershed Security Coalition and CodeBlue BC · September 2026

1. Political Context

The survey was in the field August 27 to September 1, 2026.

The following events, in the news before and since, form the context in which the results are being released. None of these were mentioned to respondents.

Date	Event
Aug 22, 2026	United States imposes 50% tariffs on roughly $20 billion of Canadian goods after trade talks collapse.
Aug 27	U.S. President signs an executive order directing the federal government to rename Lake Ontario "Lake America."
Aug 29	Ontario Premier Doug Ford unveils a "Lake Ontario — Now and Always" billboard near the border; Prime Minister Carney: "this lake is called Lake Ontario — today and forever."
Sept 1	Carney: "Canada's a sovereign state. We will strike free trade deals with the countries we wish."
Sept 7	President posts a map on Truth Social depicting Canada, Mexico, Greenland and others under the U.S. flag.
Sept 8	Canada's retaliatory tariffs on more than 700 U.S. goods take effect.
Since Mar 2025	Columbia River Treaty modernisation talks paused by the U.S. administration; not resumed as of this writing. The treaty governs flood control and power on the B.C.–U.S. Columbia system.
Sept 14–18	Union of BC Municipalities convention, Victoria. Resolutions EB22 (Lake Country: modernise industrial water rates) and EB23 (Sunshine Coast RD: funded local watershed boards) on the floor.
Nov 15	Statutory deadline for the Legislature's Finance Committee to report Budget 2027 recommendations.

How British Columbians see the players. In the same survey, impressions of U.S. President Donald Trump are 13% positive and 71% negative (65% very negative). Prime Minister Mark Carney: 48% positive / 35% negative. Premier David Eby: 30% / 44%. BC Conservative Leader Kerry-Lynne Findlay: 27% / 39%. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith: 26% / 45%.

2. Survey highlights - at a glance

Finding	Result
Protecting Canada's freshwater systems is vital to our national sovereignty and security	90% agree (53% strongly)
BC provincial government should be held accountable for protecting fresh water	92%
BC needs a strong provincial government to stand up to Ottawa and defend our interests	80% agree
Strict environmental, health and safety standards should be the price of doing business in Canada	71% agree
Concerned about a major water crisis in their community in the next few years	71% (57% in 2018)
Concerned that fast-tracking mines, fracking and data centres will increase demand on fresh water	61% extremely/quite
Strict monitoring and enforcement against toxic spills and industrial activity	90% support
Rebuild natural defences (wetlands, mature forests, natural streambanks)	89% support
Raise water rates for BC's largest industrial users (after rate comparison)	83% support (51% strongly)
Put industrial water fees in an independently-run Watershed Security Fund (vs. general revenue)	57% vs. 27%
$5-billion Watershed Security Fund is a good idea	75%

Source: McAllister Opinion Research for the BC Watershed Security Coalition, n=2,005 B.C. adults, August 27–September 1, 2026. Weighted; percentages of valid responses. Sub-group results carry wider credible intervals (see Methodology).

3. Fresh water as national security — who agrees

Please say whether you AGREE or DISAGREE with each of the following statements.

Grid · row %

	TOTAL AGREE	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	TOTAL DISAGREE
Protecting and responsibly managing Canada's freshwater systems is vital to our national sovereignty and security.	**90%**	53%	37%	8%	2%	1%	**2%**
Strict environmental, health and safety standards should be the price of doing business in Canada—not the price Canadians pay to attract foreign investment.	**71%**	32%	38%	21%	7%	2%	**8%**

Figure 1. Agreement that protecting Canada's freshwater systems is vital to national sovereignty and security, by group.

4. Sovereignty, standards and accountability

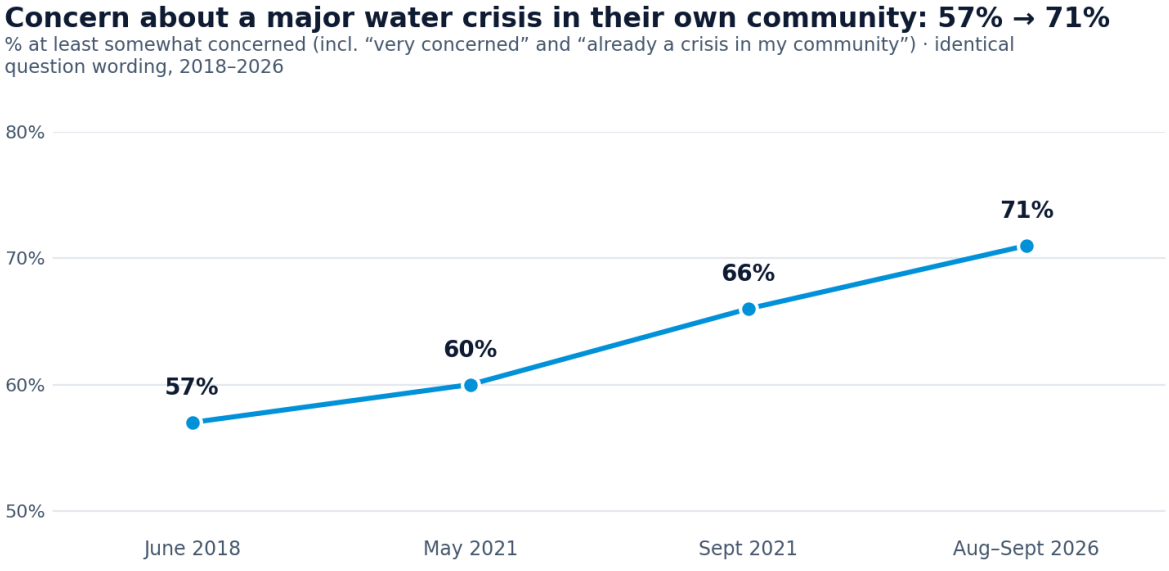
Figure 2. Agreement with five statements on sovereignty, standards and influence .

Statement	BC NDP	BC Cons.	BC Green
Protecting Canada's freshwater systems is vital to our national sovereignty and security	94%	86%	94%
Strict environmental, health and safety standards should be the price of doing business in Canada — not the price Canadians pay to attract foreign investment	85%	56%	88%

% total agree by current BC vote intention. Source: McAllister Opinion Research for the BC Watershed Security Coalition, n=2,005 B.C. adults, August 27–September 1, 2026. Weighted; percentages of valid responses. Sub-group results carry wider credible intervals (see Methodology).

Reading the table. Water-as-security is the one statement on which the three party bases converge within eight points. The "standards are the price of doing business" statement is endorsed by a majority of all party supporters. Together these describe an electorate that wants a strong province and expects strong rules — a mandate that belongs to no single party.

5. Concern at home — and the eight-year trend



Sources: McAllister Opinion Research, B.C. freshwater surveys 2018 (n=1,619), May 2021 (n=2,123), Sept 2021 (n=1,012), Aug–Sept 2026 (n=2,005).

Figure 3. Concern about a major water crisis in one's own community, 2018–2026 (identical question wording).

Wave	Total concerned	Very concerned + already a crisis
Aug–Sept 2026 (n=2,005)	71%	36%
September 2021 (n=1,012)	66%	29%
May 2021 (n=2,123)	60%	19%
June 2018 (n=1,619)	57%	22%

QUESTION: (all waves): "How concerned are you about the potential for a major water crisis in your community in the next few years?" Total concerned = somewhat + very + already a crisis.

Region (2026)	Total concerned	Very concerned + already a crisis
Thompson / Okanagan	76%	41%
Lower Mainland / Metro Vancouver	73%	35%
Vancouver Island / Coast	70%	36%
Kootenay†	65%	36%
The North†	57%	31%

† Small sub-samples; direction only. These describe public concern, not measured hydrological risk. Source: McAllister Opinion Research for the BC Watershed Security Coalition, n=2,005 B.C. adults, August 27–September 1, 2026. Weighted; percentages of valid responses. Sub-group results carry wider credible intervals (see Methodology).

What else British Columbians are concerned about (2026)

Issue	Extremely / quite concerned
Private corporations limiting access to lands, forests and water	68%
Water usage by AI data centres for cooling	66%
Water scarcity and droughts due to increasing demand for water by industry	61%
Fast-tracking of major new resource projects (mines, fracking, data centres) increasing demand on fresh water	61%
Loss of food crops due to water scarcity	58%
Water scarcity and droughts due to changing climate	57%

Source: McAllister Opinion Research for the BC Watershed Security Coalition, n=2,005 B.C. adults, August 27–September 1, 2026. Weighted; percentages of valid responses. Sub-group results carry wider credible intervals (see Methodology).

Direction and enforcement. Asked which statement is closer to their view, 60% say "demand on fresh water is going to increase faster than supply; BC needs to do what it takes to secure its fresh water sources," against 28% who say "BC has plenty of fresh water; we do not need to increase public spending during tough economic times" (13% unsure).

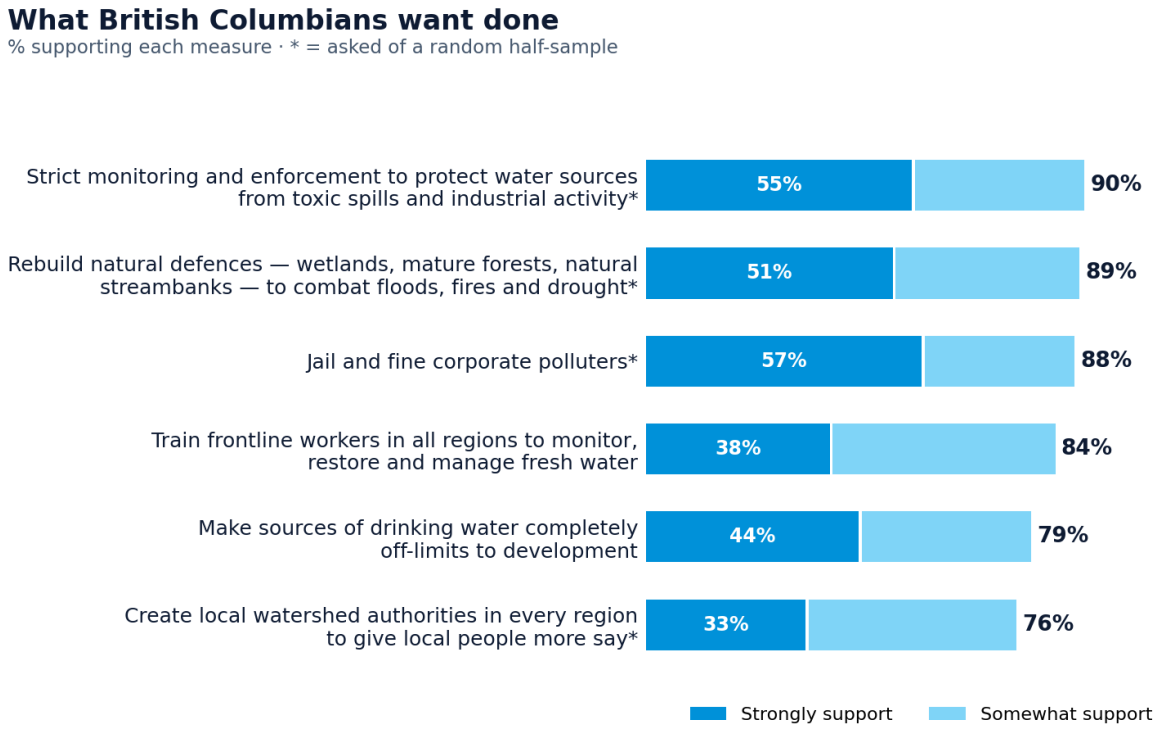
Asked to rate the BC government's enforcement of laws protecting fresh water from industrial polluters, 42% say "not tough enough," 31% "about right," 4% "too tough," 22% unsure.

6. Who is accountable

Which government should be held accountable for ensuring fresh water is protected in BC? (select all)	%
BC provincial government	92%
Federal government	63%
Regional governments	57%
Local governments	56%

The provincial figure is 90–95% in every region, every age group and every party base (BC NDP 94%, BC Conservative 92%, BC Green 95%). Source: McAllister Opinion Research for the BC Watershed Security Coalition, n=2,005 B.C. adults, August 27–September 1, 2026. Weighted; percentages of valid responses. Sub-group results carry wider credible intervals (see Methodology).

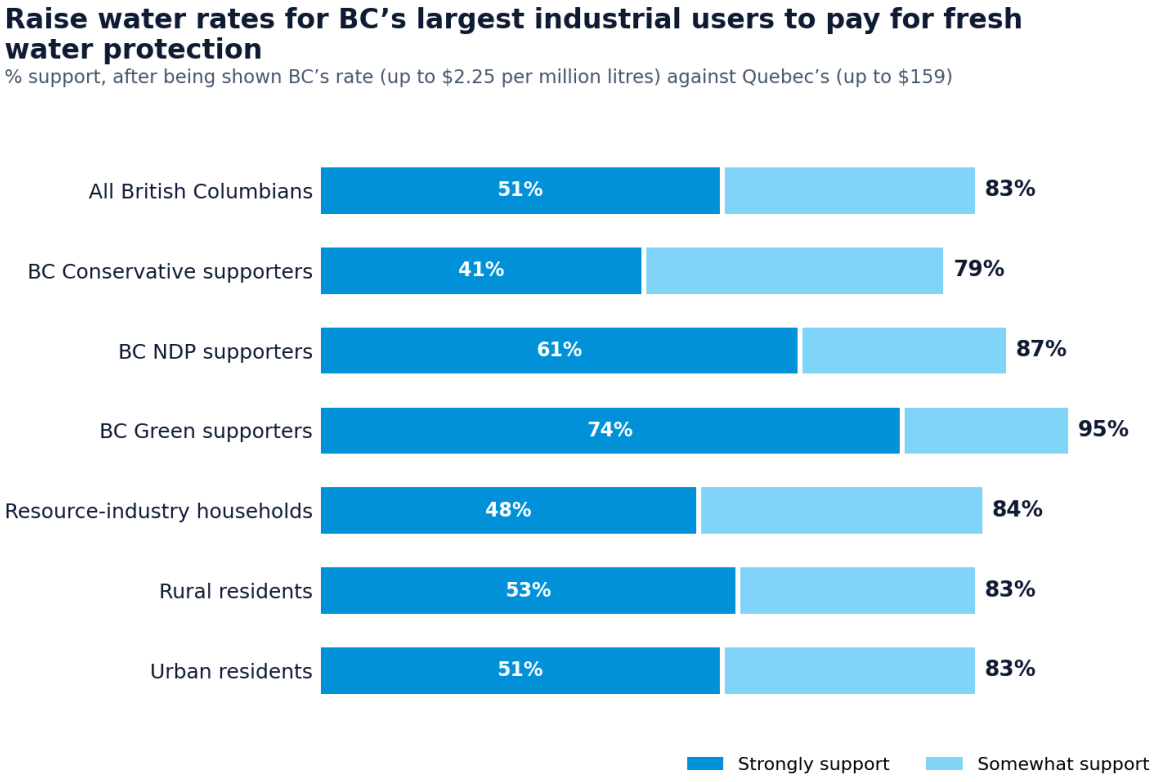
7. What British Columbians want done



Source: McAllister Opinion Research, n=2,005 B.C. adults, Aug 27–Sept 1, 2026. Weighted; % of valid responses.

*Figure 4. Support for measures to protect fresh water (E1). Items marked * were asked of random half-samples.*

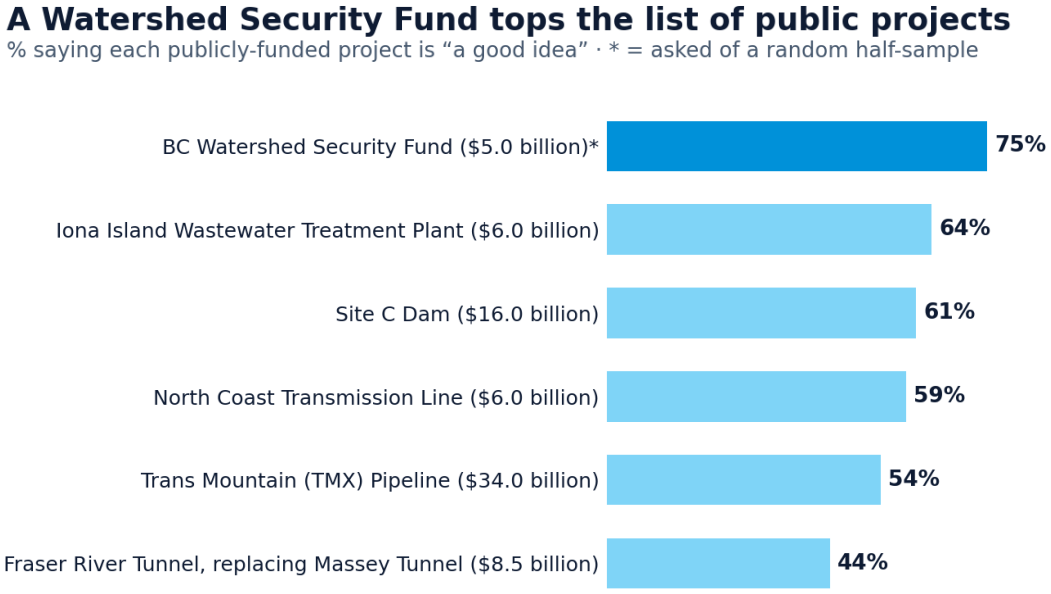
8. Paying for fresh water security



Source: McAllister Opinion Research, n=2,005 B.C. adults, Aug 27–Sept 1, 2026. Weighted; % of valid responses. Full question wording in Appendix.

Figure 5. Support for raising water rates for BC's largest industrial users, by group (G1). Informed support: the question includes the BC–Quebec comparison.

QUESTION: Today, BC charges large industrial users (e.g. a mine) less than $2.25 for the use of ONE MILLION litres of water, one of the lowest rates in Canada. At the other end of the scale, Quebec charges up to $159.00 per million litres for industrial users. Would you SUPPORT or OPPOSE raising the water rates for BC's largest industrial water users to pay for fresh water protection?



Source: McAllister Opinion Research, n=2,005 B.C. adults, Aug 27–Sept 1, 2026. Weighted; % of valid responses.

Figure 6. Share saying each publicly-funded project is “a good idea”

QUESTION: Below is a list of publicly-funded projects and initiatives that have recently been proposed or completed in British Columbia. Please say whether you think each is a GOOD IDEA or a BAD IDEA.

Survey Tracking

In 2026 the Fund leads at $5 billion (75%).

In 2024 this question described the Watershed Security Fund as $2 billion; the Fund was first again (62%).

In 2021 the same exercise at $1 billion also placed the Fund first (65%) on the list.

9. Methodology

Provincial online survey of n=2,005 British Columbia adults (18+), fielded August 27 to September 1, 2026, in English. Mixed mode: multiple professional online research panels plus social-media recruitment. Regions outside Metro Vancouver were oversampled to support regional analysis. Responses were screened for speeding, straight-lining, failed attention checks, gibberish and AI-generated open-ends. Results are weighted to the Census by rim (rake) weighting on region, gender, age and education, with regions built from Statistics Canada economic regions. Percentages are of valid (non-missing) responses. Items marked * were asked of random half-samples of roughly 1,000. Online panel and social-recruitment samples are not probability samples; the intervals below are Bayesian credible intervals used as the margin-of-error analogue. Design and analysis: McAllister Opinion Research (member, ESOMAR and AAPOR).

Base	Unweighted n	Weighted n	95% credible interval
British Columbia — total	2,005	2,005	±2.7
Lower Mainland / Metro Vancouver	766	1,224	±3.8
Vancouver Island / Coast	530	351	±4.6
Thompson / Okanagan	346	242	±6.1
Kootenay	136	65	±10.8
The North	227	122	±10.3

Party sub-groups (unweighted): BC NDP 497, BC Conservative 557, BC Green 131, undecided 459. Resource-industry households 285. Earlier waves: June 2018 (n=1,619, online panel, ±2.4%); April–May 2021 (n=2,123, ±2.1%); September 2021 (n=1,012, ±3.1%); September 2024 (n=1,200, fielded by ResearchCo, ±2.9%). All weighted to Census.

10. Context sources

- NBC News / CNN / NPR, Aug 27, 2026 — executive order renaming Lake Ontario “Lake America.”
- NPR, Aug 30, 2026 — Ford billboard and Carney response; Google Maps labelling.
- Al Jazeera / CNBC, Sept 1–3, 2026 — Carney on the trade dispute; 50% tariffs; Canada’s Sept 8 retaliation.
- The Daily Signal, Sept 8, 2026 — Truth Social map post (Sept 7).
- Government of B.C., Mar 11, 2025 — Columbia River Treaty negotiations paused by the U.S.
- Government of B.C., July 14, 2026 — water conservation request naming Koksilah, Tsolum, Salmon and Bessette watersheds; CHEK News, June 2026 — Vancouver Island snowpack 0% of normal.
- UBCM 2026 Resolutions Book, pp. 58–59 — EB22 and EB23. Legislative Assembly of B.C. — Finance Committee reporting deadline (Budget Transparency and Accountability Act).
- BC Watershed Security Coalition, Oct 2025 — Modernizing Industrial Water Rates in BC. BC Water Sustainability Fees, Rentals and Charges Tariff Regulation, Schedule 2.

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