

Surface conditions appear dry on Winter River

Nearby resident says Brackley branch reduced to a ditch

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Hardy Mill Road resident John te Raa took this picture of a fish ladder in the Winter River-Tracadie Bay watershed. The slots in the fish ladder are less than half full.

Even as efforts to create a second water source for Charlottetown continue, concern about the current one continues to grow.

A resident of the Hardy Mill Road emailed two pictures to The Guardian that supposedly depict rather dry surface conditions of the Winter River, the capital city's one and only source of water at the moment.

One of the pictures shows a box culvert under the Union Road of the Brackley branch of the Winter River and it's bone dry.

Another picture shows a fish ladder at the bottom of Hardy Pond. John te Raa, the resident who sent the pictures to The Guardian, says the slots in the fish ladder are less than half full.

Te Raa says the Brackley branch of the river has been reduced to a ditch and water flows only after a rain. The fish ladder, he says, doesn't have adequate water to meet flow requirements for fish movement.

Don Mazer, co-chairman of the Winter River-Tracadie Bay Watershed, said there are residents who are privately monitoring the river and they compare notes with members of the watershed group.

Mazer said even if the provincial government sets criteria for what the city corporation can draw from Winter River and the city stays within those permitted limits, portion of the river are going dry.

"Streams can go dry (but) there would still not be a violation of this (extraction) policy," Mazer said.

Mazer said regardless of whether the city is drawing what it is allowed to under the legislation, it isn't sustainable.

“What’s happening on the surface is important if you want to sustain aquatic life. You need a flow of water. When stream beds go dry as they do — it seems to be a yearly occurrence — you can’t sustain aquatic life and generations of fish are lost. It’s not a fish kill but, functionally, it has the same kind of impact.”

Mazer said it wouldn’t be a stretch to call it a “crisis situation”.

Simply put, Mazer said the permitted levels of extraction are not sustainable.

The city is in the process of developing five new wells at the new Miltonvale Park site to take some of the strain off Winter River (especially the Brackley well) but it won’t stop there. A third source will need to be developed down the road and those wells could very well end up on the Winter River watershed.