

All that snow this winter is good for something

Agriculture minister says province's water table recharged

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- BY DAVE STEWART

The harsh winter may have been a nightmare for P. E. I.'s roads but it has been a blessing for the province's water table.

Agriculture Minister George Webster told the P. E. I. legislature on Tuesday the water table has been completely recharged thanks to a record winter of snow.

The last couple of years has seen little snow, at least that stuck around, and hot, dry summers. "We've had a significant amount of snow and, of course, the snow protects the soil from frost. What has happened over the past two to three weeks is we've got a nice slow melt . . . and it's actually being absorbed in the soil and percolate down to the water table," Webster told The Guardian following question period.

"This is the kind of spring you want. It may be a little hard on winter roads and so on but it's excellent for the land and excellent for the water table. If you drive through the countryside you can see water percolating out of the ground. We've got a great recharge this year."

Webster said he's not basing it on any science.

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There are no studies or numbers to back up what he's saying. The minister said it's his opinion, based on years farming the land.

"I don't have any readings from the Department of Environment. They're probably monitoring that but if you drive by the countryside I can see springs actually percolating up through the ground in places and that's a real good sign that the water table is really high," the minister said. Bruce Smith, co-ordinator with the Winter River-Tracadie Bay Watershed Association, said the minister may not be far off in his assessment.

The Winter River- Tracadie Bay watershed is the only source of water for Charlottetown right now.

"We don't really have a way of measuring the groundwater but there is no question that the springs are flowing very well," Smith told The Guardian in an email.

The Department of Environment does have what is called reference wells. Smith said he heard levels in those wells are close to what they were last year but that more information will be available sometime in May.

Webster said he doesn't think the City of Charlottetown will have to worry about water restrictions this summer.

"Oh, I don't see any water restrictions whatsoever (necessary). We've got a great recharge this year and that will be good for Winter River, too, on a go- forward basis because Winter River was certainly pretty low on water last year.

“That’s no one’s fault. Charlottetown has grown by leaps and bounds over the last 20 years and the need for water is growing, too.”

Work on a second water source for the capital city is underway in Miltonvale.

Webster said while the snow helped prop up the water table, the weather can still help out over the summer.

“My wish list would be an inch of rain a week.”