

Journal #6140 from sdc 12.22

A Hand Up

Treaty chiefs warn of 'severe impacts' as Alberta passes water legislation

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New film Mauri - where Māori elders, healers, and knowledge keepers share a story of healing

'It was a shock': Nevada water regulator speaks on why he was fired



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Chief Sheldon Sunshine of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation suspects the government is trying to make it easier to divert water to AI data centres and other energy intensive projects.

[Jeremy Appel](#)



Chief Sheldon Sunshine of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation is voicing his concerns about Alberta's new amendments to the Water Act as a member of the Chiefs Steering Committee on Technical Services. (LinkedIn)

This story was originally published in [Alberta Native News](#).

Alberta's UCP government has passed legislation without any input from First Nations that poses severe risks to Alberta's watersheds, according to a group of Treaty 6, 7 and 8 chiefs.

Bill 7, the Water Amendment Act, 2025, which was introduced in the Legislative Assembly by Environment and Protected Areas Minister Rebecca Schulz, [received](#) royal assent on December 12.

The legislation updates the Water Act to enable "low-risk" transfers between water basins, empower the minister to determine a transfer's risk level, and merge the Peace-Slave and Athabasca Water Basins into one, reducing the province's number of watersheds to six.

Previously, these transfers were decided on a case-by-case basis and required special legislation to proceed. Minister Schulz [said](#) at an Oct. 30 news conference that this process is "slow, cumbersome and delays water to getting where it is needed."

Chief Sheldon Sunshine of Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, a representative of Treaty 8 on the Chiefs Steering Committee on Technical Services, told *Alberta Native News* that he was “really taken aback” when Bill 7 was introduced in late October.

Inter-basin transfers will have “severe impacts on every watershed,” as well as the people and animals who depend on them for water, said Chief Sunshine.

“The impacts are so significant to our people, it’s truly unimaginable that they would go ahead and do that without proper consultation,” he said.

Every river basin has unique scientific properties, [explains](#) the Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA), meaning a transfer from one to another risks fundamentally altering “chemical concentrations, pH, temperature, and introducing disease or invasive species into the receiving waterbody.”

“We’re dealing with such enormous cumulative impacts in our territory when it comes to resource development, and then the impacts on the water from those developments are increasingly problematic,” Sunshine said.

He suspects the government is facilitating these transfers in preparation for energy-intensive projects it has planned for northwest Alberta, specifically the \$70-billion Wonder Valley AI Data Park [proposed](#) by celebrity businessman Kevin O’Leary on Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation’s traditional lands, as well as a nuclear power plant near Peace River.

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“All of those things together put significant pressure on the resources — the water, the gas and everything else,” said Sunshine. “We’re the ones who are going to be ending up cleaning up whatever’s left over.”

He also cited concerns about increasing drought conditions in northern Alberta, in combination with plans for a [water pipeline](#) from the Peace River to Dawson Creek, B.C., to deal with drought in the Kiskatinaw River.

Over the summer, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers VP Richard Wong [called existing](#) Water Act regulations “unnecessary inefficiencies for oil and gas projects that span major basin boundaries.”

“Yet again, the Government of Alberta is stepping over First Nations’ sovereignty for short-sighted and incredibly risky moves to further the interests of industry,” said Chief Vernon Watchmaker of Kehewin First Nation in Treaty 6 in a Dec. 1 [news release](#) from the Chiefs Steering Committee.

“It will be our Peoples who will carry the burden of the Smith Government’s bad decisions.”

Wetaskiwin County Reeve John Bishop, who spoke at the government’s announcement of Bill 7, said the legislation will ensure [“equitable access”](#) to water across the province.

“Without a glacier-fed water body within our municipality, water security is critical to the success of the County of Wetaskiwin, its residents, businesses, and farmers,” he said.

[The government has said](#) Bill 7 is informed by feedback from its Water Availability Engagement, which was conducted in two phases from October 2024 to June 2025.

The results of those consultations haven’t been released to the public, but the AWA obtained documents from its first phase through a FOIP request.

The results, according to the AWA, “reveal some major differences in what is being proposed versus what the feedback collected through the public engagement recommended.”

The documents note “strong cross sector support for establishing and maintaining instream flow needs and water conservation objectives (WCOs) for all rivers, with WCOs as a key policy tool.”

“Instream flow needs describe the quantity, quality, and timing of water flow necessary to preserve and protect the function and processes of healthy, diverse, aquatic ecosystems long-term,” explains the AWA, “while water conservation objectives are the targets set by the government to mark the minimum volume and quality of water that should remain in rivers.”

More than three-quarters of the people involved in engagement had “continued expectation for careful, case-by-case analysis of inter-basin transfer applications and transparency of decision-making”.

NDP MLA Brooks Arcand-Paul, a member of Alexander First Nation, spoke against Bill 7 in the [Legislative Assembly on Dec. 2](#), noting that some international jurisdictions have given watersheds legal personhood, including the Magpie River in Quebec.

“Water is our ancestor and it deserves our respect, not management and irresponsible bills like this one to manage it like every other resource that this province likes to claim dominion over,” said Arcand-Paul.

“We are not masters over the environment. We live in coexistence with it.”

In a nod to the New Deal, outdoors work program connects Red Lake youth to their land

<https://www.minnpost.com/greater-minnesota/2025/12/how-a-new-deal-inspired-idea-is-connecting-red-lake-youth-to-their-heritage-joshua-jones/>

Red Lake tribe is one of two tribes that never signed the Dawes Act... benefits today though they suffered many years before since federal govt did not give payments to them

Fancy a change of scenery in 2026? If you're a nature lover and desperate to escape the hustle and bustle of city life, then a [new job on a tiny Scottish island](#) might just be for you. People with a particular set of skills are being encouraged to apply - would you have what it takes?

[Register Here »](#)

[Science and Nonduality Conference](#)

Watch this brand new film Mauri - where Māori elders, healers, and knowledge keepers share a story of healing - through land, language, and spirit.

Mauri is part of the Wisdom of the Ancestors documentary series, a living weave of stories from Indigenous communities across five continents.

This chapter moves with Māori elders, healers, and knowledge keepers in Aotearoa, who carry forward ancestral practices through deep connection to whenua (land), ceremony, language, and kinship.

Relationships with land, language, and lineage remain deeply rooted, even as colonial disruptions ripple through them. Mauri stays close to the breath of prayer, the touch of bodywork, the wisdom of natural medicines, and the presence of spirit in daily life.

Here, healing unfolds as reconnection, continuity, and rooted care, guided by intergenerational strength, more-than-human companionship, and the rhythms of ceremony.

When you watch or donate, your presence supports projects initiated by the communities featured in the film. Half of all contributions return directly to those continuing this work.
0:27 / 0:51

THEETERNALSONG.ORG/MAURI-REGISTER
[New Film: Māori Healers Share the Path of Ancestral Healing](#)

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Smithsonian Magazine

Archaeologists working at Chactún in Mexico say may be a 3,000-year-old layout of the stone causeways radiating the Maya understanding of earthly space with celestial

If confirmed, it would be examples of Maya offering new insight into mapped both their world [bit.ly/4pWLAQQ](https://bit.ly/4pWLAQQ)



A newly found Maya structure may be one of the oldest maps of the cosmos.

the ancient Maya site of they've uncovered what map of the cosmos. The structures with long outward appears to mirror the universe, linking order.

one of the earliest known astronomical planning, how early communities and the heavens. [https:// University of Arizona](https://University of Arizona)

Donna Cossette I hid this from myself in my



shed rediscovered it while digging out the X-Mas tree. I was asked a question about Indian Paint Brush, and was it really used for color. Yes it was used for color, but honestly I didn't know it made a green blue color. Guess we'll have to try this out. I was told by Ben Aleck blue paint was made by using and processing duck poop. So anything is possible.



## **‘It was a shock’: Nevada water regulator speaks on why he was fired**

Former state engineer Adam Sullivan, who was terminated amid a water rights struggle in an overtapped basin, said he “faced pressure” to change decisions. Tabitha Mueller

Until last week, Adam Sullivan was Nevada’s state engineer — the person most responsible for managing water in the nation’s driest state.

That changed when state officials confirmed Sullivan’s [departure from the role](#) — an unusual move, given that the state engineer often serves under multiple governors and must have expertise in Nevada’s oft-byzantine set of water laws and regulations.

So what happened?

In his first public comments since news of his departure broke, Sullivan said he was terminated amid complaints about his decisions, telling *The Nevada Independent* that there were a number of disagreements between himself, Republican Gov. Joe Lombardo’s office and the director of his department that escalated over the last six months.

“There was pressure to rescind decisions or accelerate decisions, or withhold decisions, or to not attend public meetings,” he said, noting that his dismissal “didn’t come as a complete surprise, but it was a shock.”

He added that he was the first state engineer to be terminated since 1981.

In the most arid state in the country, the state engineer is a critical role that typically ends in voluntary retirement. Sullivan said that the state engineer’s responsibility, regardless of governor, is to carry out Nevada water law, while understanding and using the best available science in decision-making.

Sullivan is perhaps best known for his involvement in court cases that led to a landmark state Supreme Court decision that established a precedent for the state to manage groundwater along with surface water and recognized the interconnectedness of groundwater systems.

That decision and other court fights demonstrate the enormous pushback the state engineer’s decisions face from developers, mining companies and other entities that want expanded access to water in Nevada.

Sullivan said he was fired by James Settelmeier, director of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, where Sullivan had worked since 2009. Settelmeier, a former Republican state senator, was appointed to the role in 2023 by Lombardo.

Spokespeople from the governor’s office did not respond to email requests for comment sent Thursday morning.

But during a [meeting](#) of the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority last week, Settlemeyer said Sullivan's departure was a decision made by the director's office to "go in a different direction." He said the office was in the process of looking at external and internal replacement candidates.

Sullivan said he was told in a meeting with Settlemeyer and two deputy directors that he was being terminated because of complaints about his decisions, that he was difficult to read and timelines for his decision-making were not clear.

As far as timelines, Sullivan said he was given the example of the Humboldt River Basin, where depletions in the river are gradually getting worse because of the effects of groundwater pumping. There are conflicts between long-term existing rights known as senior rights and newer, more junior rights. Senior water right holders, who were entitled to certain deliveries, were not getting those rights.

Water law, Sullivan said, gives the state one tool to address that: curtail junior water rights until senior water rights have been made whole. To do that, Sullivan noted, would potentially devastate local communities and economies up and down the river system.

### **Consternation over curtailment**

Water is publicly owned and therefore tricky to regulate. What's firmly established is a doctrine of prior appropriation, meaning priority is given to water users who have claimed water first in time, also known as senior water rights holders. It's a system that has been consistently upheld by state statute and the court system.

A new wrinkle [developed in 2024](#), when the Nevada Supreme Court issued its major ruling confirming for the first time that the state engineer was empowered to "conjunctively manage surface waters and groundwater." Previously, groundwater and surface water were managed separately, leading to issues of over-appropriation.

The Humboldt River Basin is where Nevada is undertaking its first major, large-scale application of conjunctive water management — the state strategy to coordinate surface and groundwater use — said Jeff Fontaine, the executive director of the Humboldt River Basin Water Authority.

"This requires the development of appropriate analytical tools, numerical capture models, and best available science to determine conflicts, impairment, and effects on surface water rights by existing groundwater permits," Fontaine said. "We also need to understand what the impacts of curtailing groundwater pumping would be and how individuals and communities would adapt."

But part of that strategy could involve curtailment, which is challenging to implement and often leads to major pushback when it's being promoted from bigger water users that are junior rights holders. With the possibility of curtailment being discussed as part of a draft order affecting the Humboldt River Basin, sources familiar with the process who asked to remain anonymous said there was frustration among junior rights holders who wanted access to the water and senior rights holders who wanted to protect their rights.

Sullivan said he and his staff have been holding public meetings regarding curtailment, and working with affected groups and individuals to find ways to potentially resolve the conflict with minimal economic effects.

There were some, Sullivan said, who were upset about his work, though he declined to give specifics.

At last week's Humboldt River Basin Water Authority meeting, Settelmeyer referenced the management of the Humboldt River Basin and said it was important to avoid curtailment of water rights. He added that he was asking the governor to establish a blue ribbon commission to address the problem.

"Curtailment is a very drastic step if we have to go completely by seniority," he said. "In that respect, I'm asking the governor to do just that, then give those informations to the new state engineer and allow him to process those, and maybe we can avoid the concept of curtailing in that process."

Though discussions had taken place about releasing a draft order from the division before the end of the year, Settelmeyer said the draft order had "flaws" and there needs to be more time to have the United States Geological Survey complete modeling and validate existing models.

"We need to have better science, better information so that we can proceed faster," Settelmeyer said. "We have to slow down for a little bit, but by doing so, I feel we'll be able to apply more gas and get to the end quicker than was previously stated. But for now, we need to get that information validated."

The Humboldt River Basin on Feb. 23, 2020. (David Calvert/The Nevada Independent)

### **Understanding the politics behind the decision**

Notably, the [draft order](#) Settelmeyer discussed was not designed to be a final decision, but a "starting point" for public input. A summary of the draft included in last week's public meeting's agenda materials noted that it was designed to "help stakeholders understand what curtailment could look like and begin shaping practical, community-driven alternatives before any final decisions are made."

Still, many water users perceived it as moving in that direction.

Kyle Roerink, executive director of the pro-water conservation nonprofit Great Basin Water Network, said the idea of curtailment via the draft order was likely the nail in the coffin for Sullivan's termination. Roerink said if the draft order had moved forward, it would have likely been implemented in the next decade.

The firing, he added, confirms many rumblings he's heard over discontent on long-term water management strategy, including an increased desire for more water than what's available and a backlog of applications that many interests would like to see approved.

He described it as a “powder keg” of frustration from various interests, including mining companies and developers.

Roerink said applications and requests related to water rights often require lengthy considerations, and state necessary to work through been recent attempts to speed open-endedness to water law litigation. He said it doesn't underfunded and short-staffed.

One open question, Roerink Sullivan. If he is replaced with willing to make appropriations factor, Roerink worries that state.

“I certainly didn't agree with over time,” Roerink said. “But describe Adam is someone making appropriations where there was actually water available, and where there wasn't going to be conflict with existing rights holders and where there wasn't going to be harms with public interests.”



officials should take the time them. He noted that there have up the process, and there's that can lead to arduous help that the division is

said, is who will replace a regulator who is more in places where scarcity is a could be a detriment to the

every decision that he made I think the best way to who did have a commitment to

### **Continuing to protect water rights**

Daniel Rothberg, a former *Nevada Independent* reporter who is working on a book about water and power in the Great Basin for Island Press, said the state engineer is one of the most powerful regulators in Nevada.

The state engineer's office — responsible for managing water quantity across the state, issuing new water rights, approving changes in how water is used, and enforcing the law when there are conflicts between different water users — has always faced tension between managing water for economic needs and ensuring there's enough water for future generations, Rothberg said.

Historically, Rothberg noted that there are more rights to use water than there is water to go around in many places in Nevada — and the state has to figure out a way to get groundwater basins back into balance.

“State engineers, whether it's been Jason King or Tim Wilson or Adam Sullivan, have all had to grapple with that legacy, to find ways to reduce demand and conserve water to get basins back into balance,” Rothberg said. “Curtailed is the state's statutory option and is always out there, but it's very difficult to implement.”

Sullivan, who served as an administrator for five years and a deputy for three years before that, said his philosophy was to “balance what's in the public interest for smart growth, making beneficial use of the water resource, but we need to do that in a way that also protects the resource and protects existing rights.”

Roerink added that the tension has led to proposals to shift state law around water appropriations in the past few legislative sessions and Sullivan’s departure could open the door for erosion of public interest protections and undermine senior water rights holders.

Despite disagreements with his decisions, Sullivan said he’s confident in the decisions he and his staff have made. He said he is proud of the division's efforts to advance the hydrologic science that determines water availability, clarifying the intent of the law via court cases and supporting staff professional development. He added that he has respect and admiration for the professionalism and integrity of staff who worked alongside him.

It’s inherent to the position that there will be contentious decisions, he said.

“Water rights issues are complicated and there are no easy solutions,” Sullivan said. “I don’t fault anyone for trying to do what they think is best to protect the public resource. I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished, but we need to continue investing in water science so Nevada can be proactive and well-supported with decisions.”



*Fields in the Humboldt River Basin in Lovelock on Oct. 3, 2023. (David Calvert/The Nevada Independent)*



***“What I have learned from my own experience is that the most important ingredients in a child’s education are curiosity, interest, imagination, and a sense of the adventure of life.” - Eleanor Roosevelt***