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New report says markets are a poor solution to Alberta's water woes Non-market solutions would be better for environment, public interest, and First Nations

EDMONTON – A new report released this morning by the U of A's Parkland Institute says an expansion of water markets in Alberta would have adverse effects on the environment, people's access to water, and First Nations communities. It also recommends alternatives for dealing with Alberta's current water crisis that would be more in keeping with Albertans' values, and the values that underlie Alberta's historical water laws.

The report, titled *Alternative Water Futures in Alberta*, comes as the Alberta government prepares to announce its plans for public consultations on the future of water allocation in Alberta—consultations that were first promised over two years ago.

"To date the Alberta government has only considered reports calling for market-based solutions; this report demonstrates clearly that there are other alternatives, better alternatives," says Parkland's executive director Ricardo Acuña.

The report's author, Trudeau Scholar Jeremy J. Schmidt, says that it would not only be problematic to build a water market on top of the existing rights regime, but that in many ways markets are actually directly opposed to the foundational ideas that underlie the entire water allocation regime we have today.

"Considering the flaws in Alberta's existing water framework, and looking at the water problems the province is struggling with, it doesn't make sense to look at it only as an economic issue," says Schmidt. "Alberta needs a broader, more comprehensive framework that can be flexible in responding to future uncertainties. The one-size-fits-all market approach the government is considering doesn't fit the bill."

The report also makes a number of concrete recommendations to the provincial government. Some of the key ones include:

- aligning water rights with a system for groundwater regulation;
- recognizing water in situ as fully in use and assessing all existing and future licences for their benefit to Alberta;
- acknowledging in the *Water Act* that water is a resource to be stewarded in trust for the well-being of the community;
- supporting and recognizing a self-designed and self-governed First Nations water council that is granted authority for water planning in First Nations' territory and which coordinates with other governing bodies;
- enforcing minimum flows for the protection of aquatic ecosystems and human health; and
- reforming licences to proportions of watershed flows rather than absolute quantities.

The Parkland Institute is a non-partisan public policy research institute in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. The report *Alternative Water Futures in Alberta* is available for download on the Parkland website at <http://parklandinstitute.ca>.

Jeremy Schmidt begins a five-city tour of Alberta with a free public speaking event tonight in Edmonton at 7:00 pm in Room 217 of the U of A's Telus Building (Corner of 111 Street & 87 Avenue). He will also be visiting Red Deer, Calgary, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat from December 6 – 9, respectively.

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