

Fracking With Fresh Water In A Time of Severe Drought

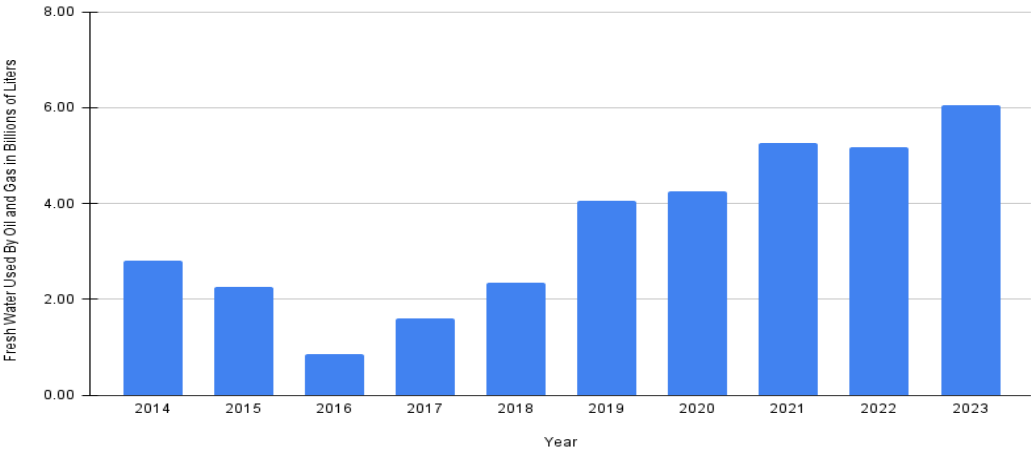
Record breaking freshwater extraction in a time of drought

[New data released by the BC Energy Regulator \(BCER\)](#) shows that, despite the fact that the Peace and Fort Nelson districts in northeastern B.C. are in the grips of a multi-year drought, oil and gas companies have increased the amount of fresh water they withdrew from rivers and lakes in the region, setting a new record of over six billion liters of water taken in 2023. That represents an increase of more than 800 million liters, or 16%, over the previous year, just as the impacts of the drought were intensifying.

Unlike other water users, oil and gas companies [remove the water they use from the water cycle permanently](#) because after they are done with it, it is so polluted that it must be disposed of down wells that trap it below the water table.

[A new report from the David Suzuki Foundation](#) projects that given current policies – including new LNG terminals being built on B.C.’s coast which would lead to a dramatic increase in the number of fracking wells in the Peace region to supply – there will continue to be big increases in the amount of water used by fracking companies. They found that B.C.’s total fracking water usage could surpass 16 billion liters a year by 2050.

Fresh Water Usage By Oil and Gas Continues To Rise As Drought Takers Hold



The impacts of the drought

The drought has led to unprecedented low water levels in local rivers, [according to climate records that go back 100 years](#). While oil and gas companies have increased the amount of fresh water they remove from rivers and lakes, other major water users in the region are struggling with declining water levels. The Peace region is home to some of the most fertile agricultural land in the province, but farmers are facing growing challenges. In particular, high feed prices are forcing many cattle farmers to sell their herds.

Low snowpack and lower river levels have led BC Hydro reservoirs on the Peace River to drop several metres, and this has in turn reduced electricity generation. [In 2023, the utility imported about 10,000 gigawatt hours of electricity to cope with a shortfall in water entering its reservoirs](#).

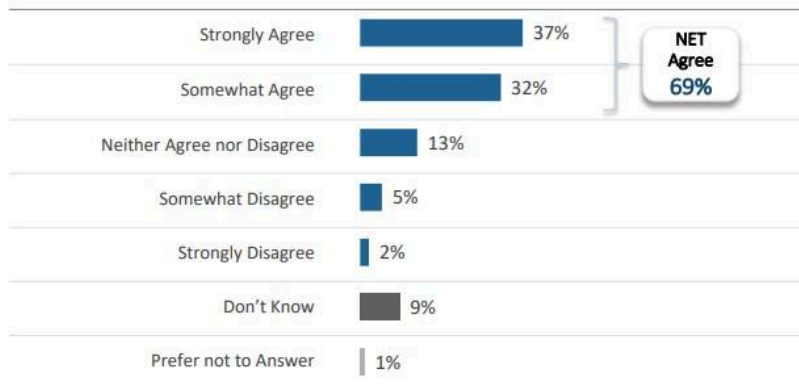
The most alarming impact of the drought has been the record-breaking wildfires that have been made much worse by tinder-dry conditions in the region. In the summer of 2023, the Donnie Creek wildfire in the north of the Peace Region became the largest wildfire in B.C.'s recorded history, [burning over 5,715 square kilometres, an area larger than Prince Edward Island](#). Low snowfall over the winter meant that Donnie Creek and many of the other major fires in the region did not go out and continued to burn deep underground. This spring, many of these so-called zombie fires flared up again, causing an early fire season. Perhaps the most notable of examples was the Parker Lake wildfire, which burnt several homes to the ground in the community of Fort Nelson in May of 2024. Unfortunately, B.C. is predicted to face another record breaking year of wildfires and the northeast of the province is likely to once again be on the frontline.

The public demands change

[A new poll conducted by Leger](#) found that 69% of B.C. residents agree the provincial government should introduce new measures to reduce and regulate freshwater use by oil and gas companies, particularly for fracking. Among BC NDP and Green Party supporters, that number increases to 84%.

Reducing and Regulating Freshwater Use by Oil and Gas Companies

To what extent do you agree with: “the provincial government should introduce new measures to reduce and regulate freshwater use by oil and gas companies, particularly for fracking which uses large amounts of water”



Base: All respondents n= 1,001
 Q10. Given the ongoing drought conditions in Northeastern BC, where much of the province's oil and gas sector is based, the provincial government should introduce new measures to reduce and regulate freshwater use by oil and gas companies, particularly for fracking which uses large amounts of water. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Policy recommendations to reduce freshwater use by oil and gas and increase transparency

1. Require the treatment and increased reuse of fracking wastewater to reduce the amount of freshwater used in the process;
2. Improve standards for disposal wells and begin baseline and ongoing testing of water systems impacted by oil and gas;
3. End special treatment for oil and gas by returning the power to issue water license and permits for the industry to the Water Stewardship Branch; and
4. Charge fracking companies a price for water high enough to encourage the conservation of freshwater.