

Water-export bill leaky, critics say

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A federal proposal to stop Canadian water from being exported wholesale to an increasingly thirsty United States contains loopholes that would render it useless should drought-stricken Americans decide they want access to this country's greatest natural resource, experts say.

Legislation to prohibit bulkwater removal that was introduced last month by Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon was limited to those rivers that cross the national border - a move that Ottawa says respects the provinces' jurisdiction over the water that lies within their boundaries.

But the Canadian Water Issues Council, a group of water experts and former water policy makers affiliated with the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, say federal reluctance to step on provincial toes has made the law toothless.

The Americans already have access to water in rivers that either start in the U.S. or end there, said Ralph Pentland, the council's chairman, who wrote to Mr. Cannon this week on behalf of the group to propose amendments that he says should not prompt a federal provincial battle.

"If you think about it," Mr. Pentland said, "why would anybody take water out of [a border-crossing] river for the purpose of exporting it to the U.S.?"

On the other hand, he said, the American may at some point want to tap into Canadian rivers that do not cross the border by creating channels to those that do.

Bill C-26 would do nothing to prevent that. Nor would it prohibit pipelines or canals from being built to send water south into the United States from bodies of water that begin and end inside Canada.

Letter to Minister Cannon Available in English at

<http://www.powi.ca/pdfs/other/CWIC%20Letter%20on%20C26%20English.pdf>

Letter to Minister Cannon Available in French at

<http://www.powi.ca/pdfs/other/CWIC%20Final%20on%20C26%20French.pdf>

