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COUNTRY LIFE IN BC

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Water fines upped

Irrigation, dams targeted

PETER MITHAM

WESTWOLD – Drawing groundwater illegally is now subject to fines of up to \$500,000 following the province's announcement of a host of new penalties for violations of the eight-year-old Water Sustainability Act.

"Previously, small fines (as much as \$230) were available for minor violations or, for the most serious violations, court prosecution," the province said in announcing the changes. "The new fines for

First in time ▶



Green is gold

Sheri Braun holds fresh olives harvested from the trees she and her husband George tend on Salt Spring Island. Pressing the hard berries yields precious oil that sells for \$125 per 200 ml bottle. It's been a dream come true for the couple. Read their story on page 31. *THE OLIVE FARM*

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Farm class numbers drop

PETER MITHAM

VICTORIA – The number of farm properties in the province has dropped, according to BC Assessment data released January 1.

The number of farm properties on the 2024 tax roll is 50,565, down 1% from 51,066 properties last year. The aggregate value is nearly \$1.3 billion.

BC Assessment deputy assessor Peter Alexander, who focuses on farm properties, said legislated assessment

rates for valuing farmland means the roll's value changes little from year to year.

Alexander also cautioned that current year figures are not directly comparable to previous years, due to the parameters applied each year.

However, in 2020 and 2021, the roll had nearly 53,000 farm properties with an assessed value of \$1.3 billion.

While the province waived the need for producers to requalify for farm class status during the pandemic and following the heat dome of

2021, this changed with last year's roll.

Property owners affected by last summer's wildfire were encouraged to contact BC Assessment last fall, but Alexander said extreme weather appears to have had little impact on valuations this year.

"We have not received a significant number of inquiries on farm properties where extreme weather events have been reported to impact operations," he says.

Farm assessments ▶

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