

Okanagan Basin
WATER BOARD

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November 20, 2009

Robert Hobson, Chair
Regional District of Central Okanagan
1450 KLO Road
Kelowna, BC V1W 3Z4

Re: Recommended local government actions to drought-proofing of the Okanagan

Dear Chair Robert Hobson and Regional Directors:

Significant low flows in Okanagan Lake this year have provided a stark reminder of our vulnerability to water shortages and of the immediate importance of working together to "drought proof" the Okanagan Basin.

Drought conditions will impact our communities in many different ways. Drought can reduce supplies for drinking water and household use, lead to lower streamflows and warmer river temperatures for fish, and limit the water available for irrigating our crops, orchards and vineyards. Over the next decade it will be very important for local governments to prepare for the impacts of population growth, development and climate change on water supplies. How well prepared is your community?

In July 2009, the Okanagan Basin Water Board hosted a workshop where more than ninety politicians, water purveyors, consultants and members of non-profit groups from around the Okanagan gathered together to discuss how to best prepare for water shortages. The outcome of the workshop was the document "Living Within Our Means: Recommendations for Drought Proofing the Okanagan," which is available at www.obwb.ca/drought_planning_workshop_2009/. The document summarizes the workshop, identifies drought planning tools and resources, and provides drought proofing actions that can be taken by government, water purveyors, and the OBWB.

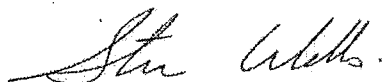
Actions by the Okanagan local governments:

- **Build Drought Teams:** Establish local drought management teams following the guidelines in the *Dealing with Drought: A Handbook for Water Suppliers in British Columbia*, available at: www.env.gov.bc.ca/wsd/public_safety/drought_info/cabinet/drought_handbook2009V2.pdf
- **Put Plans in Place:** Prepare Drought Management Plans, Water Conservation Plans, and Emergency Drought Plans following the template in the *Dealing with Drought* handbook. When all purveyors use the same template, plans can be linked together across regions.

- **Take Action for Water Conservation:** Improve water efficiency in your community by considering the following actions:
 - *Xeriscape parks; median strips and public spaces* to lead by example and demonstrate attractive landscaping with water saving plants (see <http://okanaganxeriscape.org/index.htm> for more information);
 - *Use the Landscape Irrigation Calculator* (www.irrigationbc.com/) to determine an appropriate irrigation schedule for municipal landscaping.
 - *Estimate cost savings* with the Water Conservation Calculator (available from the Ministry of Community and Rural Development, fall 2009) to determine the best value of different water conservation measures;
 - *Implement demand management* programs that include universal metering of domestic, agricultural, and utility water extractions and volume-based water pricing;
 - *Landscape and irrigation bylaws* like those developed for the City of Kelowna;
 - *Water conservation bylaws* that include outdoor water use restrictions to have consistent and coordinated conservation efforts among all users;
 - *Purple pipes* in new construction to capture rainwater and recycle gray water;
 - *Common sprinkling restrictions* between neighbouring jurisdictions;
- **Protect the Quality of Supplies:** Protect and restore stream banks to preserve water quality;
- **Recharge aquifers:** Implement stormwater best practices to recharge aquifers and protect water quality;
- **Measure and Record What You Have:** Install flow measurement recorders at reservoir spillways to track water availability and identify low water levels early;
- **Communicate to Water Users:** Develop a plan to communicate your drought management goals, actions, water supply status, and forecasts to major water users in the community.

The OBWB looks forward to developing strong partnerships with local and senior governments to support the implementation of strategic drought plans and develop innovative and timely drought management communication tools in the Okanagan. This work will benefit our drought prone region while providing a model of drought governance, economic and information tool development that will be a leading light to other dry regions throughout Canada.

Sincerely,



Stu Wells
Chair, OBWB



Anna Warwick Sears
Executive Director, OBWB