

Central Okanagan NEWS

Water stewardship

by [Wayne Moore](#) | Story: 114895 - May 10, 2014 / 7:49 am



Photo: Contributed

Allison MacMillan with Okanagan College's Water and Engineering Technology Dept. and OC's Katerina Hay the Alumni and Community Relations Coordinator, Okanagan Basin Water Board Chair Doug Findlater and Okanagan Water Stewardship Council vice-chair Rob Birtles

One year ago, the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council was recognized with a national "Excellence in Water Stewardship" award from Canada's Council of the Federation, in competition with 16 other BC nominees. It also received \$1,000.

This week, in celebration of BC Drinking Water Week, May 4 to 10, the council turned around and gifted the \$1,000 as a bursary for an Okanagan College student in the Water Engineering Technology program.

The donation was presented to Okanagan College at Thursday's regular council meeting and is intended to encourage a student interested in environmental monitoring and management of water systems.

The council, a technical advisory committee to the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), received the award in recognition for its outstanding achievements, innovation, leadership and finding collaborative ways to protect Okanagan water.

Membership in the council includes diverse community groups, from scientists to water managers, farmers to anglers, and realtors.

Together, they advise on such technical issues as the Okanagan valley's hydrology, as well as non-technical issues such as the varied uses of the watershed, from forestry and mining to fishing and hiking, all of which impact water.

"The monthly council meetings provide Okanagan residents and water professionals with a regular opportunity to discuss water issues and learn from other perspectives," said Nelson Jatel, OBWB's water stewardship director.

"The council was unanimous in deciding that this national prize, recognizing water stewardship, collaborative learning, and life-long learning should be passed on to a deserving student who will become tomorrow's water professional."

The Okanagan basin includes 19 government jurisdictions, is home to more than 315,000 people, and at least double that in visitors, plus a sometimes-endangered diversity of fish and wildlife — and all rely on a single source of water, points out Anna Warwick Sears, the OBWB's executive director.

"The Okanagan is one of the most water-stressed regions in Canada," said Warwick Sears.

"It is a lovely, unique and very complex, fragile, semi-arid landscape that is rapidly urbanizing. How do you make sense of such complexity without broad agreement from across sectors? Now is certainly the time to start training the next generation of water experts."

The significance of the council is that with such diversity, often conflicts over water can be resolved before they grow, she noted. "We only have one valley and one water supply, and these students are our future."