



RBC grant of \$90,000 will fund water education throughout Okanagan

By staff1 on July 2, 2014

The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) will be conducting programs to educate businesses and homeowners about water use in landscaping over the coming year.

The programs are thanks to a \$90,000 grant from RBC's Blue Water Project and the RDOS will be administering them in other Okanagan regional districts and towns from Vernon to Osoyoos.

"There has to be one administrator, so we were the ones that worked with the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) to apply as the regional district," said Zoe Kirk, RDOS Public Works Special Projects, who will be co-ordinating the programs.

All three regional districts of the Okanagan and the OBWB supported the application, which will fund programs throughout the region, she said.

"It's a partnership," she said, explaining how the new programs will complement the existing 'Make Water Work' campaign delivered through OBWB's WaterWise program.

The expanded program will include workshops held probably in the fall for landscape businesses and irrigation installers and will focus on outdoor water conservation landscaping.

The timing is intended to reach these businesses after their busiest season, but before they shut down for the year, Kirk explained.

Then in the spring workshops will be directed at homeowners to teach them "residential landscape irrigation and design 101," Kirk said.

"So at the same time we're trying to bring industry up to speed, we're going to give some education to the residents of these three regions on what to look for," said Kirk. "It's basically right plant, right place."

The message will be that by choosing the right plants to go into the right places, water consumption can be reduced and you can still have a beautiful garden.

Kirk said plant recommendations are based on what is termed "the Okanagan plant palette," which means plants that have passed the test for being good choices to grow in the Okanagan.

Some people currently are inconsistent, she said, growing something like a Russian sage to use little water and then planting a water-thirsty rhododendron near it.

“There’s a big disconnect there and landscape designers sometimes fall into the same category,” said Kirk. “They choose whatever looks pretty when it’s not necessarily the best way to do it. You can get four season colour and you can get seasonal interest by designing it correctly in the first place, or by redeveloping your gardens in the correct way.”

An additional aspect of the projects will be the development of high-profile urban demonstration gardens so that people can see the techniques in action. These will have signage and will direct people to further information, Kirk said.

“We’ll be putting demonstration gardens in the North Okanagan, Central Okanagan and the South Okanagan,” said Kirk. “I’m hoping we can get some representation of a fourth one in the Osoyoos area.”

This will depend on whether there is sufficient budget, she added.

Last year the RBC Blue Water Project provided a smaller grant of \$15,000, Kirk said.

This was used to extend the OBWB’s water conservation project to areas of the RDOS that are outside the Okanagan, but that experience water shortages – in particular parts of the Similkameen basin.

The RBC Blue Water Project is a 10-year, \$50 million grant program to support projects dedicated to water conservation, watershed protection, access to clean drinking water and other fresh-water-related issues in Canada and around the world.

RICHARD McGUIRE
Osoyoos Times