

## Okanagan: Three wetland restoration initiatives set to motion

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Published: **September 12, 2014 02:00 PM**

Updated: **September 12, 2014 02:352 PM**

The Okanagan Wetlands Strategy the Okanagan Basin Water Board is overseeing will foster three projects intended to improve or restore wetlands before March, members of the Water Stewardship Council were told Thursday.

It's a highly ambitious target as the project has only moved from the data collection phase to the action phase a week ago, leaving just over six months to identify the projects to tackle and complete the mission.

"Those projects will probably be some of the simpler ones were there are partners in place who are ready to go," said Jillian Tamblyn, of Water's Edge Consulting, the contractor spearheading this phase.

The Wetland Strategy is a grand undertaking pulling together as many forms of data and information as possible to provide a clear picture of the number and quality of wetland habitats remaining in the Okanagan.

It will identify which habitats are at risk and set a course to restore these environments in logical order.

The initial three projects will be followed by three more in 2016.

The term "project" is loose in this case. There will be work geared for policymakers and other initiatives geared to communication contractors, like signage to help preserve given habitats, in addition to actual habitat restoration.

The findings of the work thus far are alarming.

After pulling in data sources from government and academia, interviews and photographs, the group determined there are 3587 wetlands from the United States border to the edge of the Similkameen Valley and up through the North Okanagan.

Some 88 per cent of those were determined to be unprotected.

What was and was not considered protected within the definitions of the study is complicated as even wetlands contained within conserved parkland were considered at risk if other forms of land use within the immediate vicinity put the health of the habitat in question.

The Okanagan Wetlands Strategy is a multi-phase undertaking with the BC Wildlife Federation, the Regional District of the Central Okanagan and the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

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