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Information lacking on valley's water flow

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You can't manage what you can't measure.

But, the Okanagan's network of hydrometric stations measuring the amount of water flowing in streams throughout the Okanagan Basin's watersheds, was dismantled in the 1980s and 1990s as a budget-cutting measure by the federal government. A total of 156 such stations were discontinued.

That lack of current information can lead to problems managing water in the valley.

Hydrologist Don Dobson has been assessing and reporting on water in the Okanagan Basin for all levels of government, water utilities and industry for a number of decades and he made a plea to members of the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council.

He warned that without re-instating an adequate hydrometric network, we could be making decisions based on erroneous data.

"If precipitation patterns are changing and we use old data, we're basing our decisions on mistaken assumptions," explained Dobson.

In fact, with significant watershed changes due to wildfire, pine beetle-ravaged timber and other climate change-related effects, he warned we are probably already doing some of that.

What's needed is the re-activation of 65 of those stations and creation of 28 new ones, to add to the 25 active Water Survey of Canada stations and the 32 operated by others, such as by water utilities, he told the council. That would bring the network up to 150 stations.

He'd like to convince the Okanagan Basin Water Board, to which the stewardship council reports, to take the lead in establishing a new regional system of hydrology stations to be

operated in the basin.

Without federal or provincial funds, it's likely going to be up to local government to take care of it, he commented.

He estimated that for \$515,000 it would be possible to build enough stations, and for a further \$750,000 annually, to operate them.

"It looks daunting," he admitted, but he said already most water utilities in the valley maintain several upland stations, so if the data from those was gathered by staff but made available in a central archive, that cost could drop substantially.

"We should begin by identifying existing stations," he said.

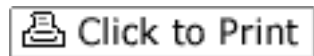
, and encourage water suppliers to establish or re-establish stations.

The OWSC, a technical advisory body to the OBWB, which is made up of regional district directors from throughout the basin, agreed to appoint a sub-committee to hammer out a proposal for the OBWB.

Chairman Bernie Bauer agreed it's important the basin be self-sufficient in measuring water throughout the watershed so that water management decisions are based on current information.

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