

Local

Planning for water shortages

By Daily Courier Staff

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Experts from a wide range of fields have joined with the public and community groups at UBC Okanagan this week to discuss emerging water science issues.

The B.C. Water Symposium, which wraps up today (Wednesday), is happening simultaneously in three B.C. cities - Kelowna, Victoria and Prince George, thanks to videoconferencing.

The discussions are focusing on water protection and conservation, climate change, watershed protection, groundwater mining and new water technologies.

Insights from the symposium will be used to develop a B.C. Water Science Strategy, which was identified as a priority action item in the province's Living Water Smart water plan released in 2008.

The meeting was organized by MITACS, a national research network that connects university-based researchers with companies, government and not-for-profit organizations around emerging societal and business issues, and the B.C. Ministry of Environment.

"The amount of useable water available to Okanagan residents is much less than most people think. And the reality is that in dry years, our water supplies will be at critical levels if we don't plan wisely," said Dr. Bernard Bauer, UBCO professor in earth and environmental sciences and geography.

"This symposium is fostering dialogue and collaboration around the major water issues confronting us in B.C., and more importantly, it will identify the ways in which water managers and policy makers can better utilize information and knowledge that is currently available."

The Southern Interior is often referred to as the 'canary in the coal mine' when it comes to water resource concerns because the climate is semi-arid and increasingly prone to drought conditions given projected global warming, he said.

The recent Okanagan Water Supply and Demand Study - spearheaded by the Okanagan Basin Water Board - showed that water challenges can be expected in the future because of expanding population growth and the tendency to use water in non-beneficial ways.

For example, more than 20 per cent of the water used in the Okanagan is used for watering lawns.

Despite the perception the Okanagan has plentiful water because of nearby lakes, the total amount of water stored in these lakes is largely irrelevant because most of that water cannot be used.

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