

# Local

## Water board looks to future in reviewing year just past

By Ron Seymour

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Drivers in the Australian capital of Canberra are always aware of how much water is available to their city.

Electronic boards alongside major highways flash messages such as this: "Our dams - 53 per cent full."

The communication strategy is aimed at encouraging residents to always practise water conservation, says Anna Warwick Sears, director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, who saw the signs while on a trip to Australia.

"Everyone who drives in and out the city knows what the water situation is," Sears said Friday during the 40th annual general meeting of the board, held in Kelowna.

Such a high-profile messaging system might one day be adopted in the Okanagan, Sears suggested, particularly during times of water shortages, as occurred earlier this year in the North Okanagan.

Those drought-like conditions, which led to widespread restrictions on water use, caught the OBWB by surprise, Sears said.

"It was embarrassing, actually," she said, explaining that the board was so focused on long-range planning and research that it wasn't as prepared as it might have been to deal with an immediate shortage of water in one part of the Valley.

The board responded quickly, however, Sears said, by convening a number of public workshops at which experts gave comprehensive overviews of water availability.

Other highlights of the board's activity this year, she said, included the preparation of a study comparing water rates throughout the Okanagan, and partnering with a raft of other agencies on various water research projects.

The results of a major study commissioned by the board on future water supplies suggest global warming will lead to about 30 more frost-free days in the Okanagan by 2050, Sears said.

While total precipitation levels will remain about the same, more of it will come in the form of rain rather than snow. That will present challenges to people who manage reservoirs throughout the Valley, Sears said, since there won't be as much of a "gush" associated with the spring runoff from the snow melt.

In the future, there are likely to be more conflicts among water users in the summer, Sears said, underscoring the need for more co-operation among the dozens of water purveyors in the Valley.

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