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Revolutionizing water management



Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, answers reporters' questions following the launch of SWURT.

Sean Connor/Capital News

By [Judie Steeves - Kelowna Capital News](#)

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It may seem like it comes from many different sources, but in fact we share one interconnected water in this near-desert valley, so every move toward sharing and cooperating means management of it can be more efficient and effective.

That reminder came from Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan at the launch of a new web-based tool to keep an ongoing record of what's being used by the valley's largest utilities.

"There used to be a lot more parochialism in the valley, but it's getting better," commented Cannan.

The Streamlined Water Use Reporting Tool, or SWURT, was launched Friday with a training session for staff from water utilities who will begin using it immediately.

Monthly online reporting of water use will replace the annual, paper report of water use that utilities have submitted to the province up to now.

It is information that will also be available for water managers to see at a glance what their usage is in comparison to other utilities, in comparison to last year's use, and along with data on environmental conditions, evapo-transpiration rates and snowpack measurements as well.

It begins with the 25 largest utilities in the Okanagan as a pilot, but the tool will eventually include all 100 utilities in the valley, said Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, which worked with the province and water utilities to get the project up and running.

She said groundwater information will also be included, which is a first in the province, since those using wells in B.C. are not required to report on water use.

SWURT will help users to share water from the same watershed better, by keeping track of what's being used by everyone drawing from the same source, on a monthly basis.

“It will provide a global picture of the valley's water use,” explained Sears.

She said it's expected the pilot would be expanded across the province once it's up and running in the Okanagan.

It's particularly important in this dry climate where there's even less water available per person than just about anywhere else in Canada, she noted.

Yet, the average Okanagan resident uses twice the water that the average Canadian uses.

Funding for the \$249,100 project, which included creation of a new computer program by Spot Solutions, came from the Building Canada Fund, Environment Canada and the water board.

The new system will also reduce requests from several ministries for information which will now be available to them online, which will be more efficient for everyone involved.

It will also help in judging trends in water use.

Wenda Mason of the provincial environment ministry commented the new program is a “really sweet, simple-to-use tool.”

Next, noted Darren Schlamp of the Glenmore-Ellison Irrigation District, more groundwater information needs to be included, as well as information from a streamflow monitoring network.

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