

## LOCAL

### International water flows eyed at Osoyoos conference

By JOHN MOORHOUSE

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With a 25-year agreement governing the level of Osoyoos Lake set to expire in 2013, a special water forum in Osoyoos has gained keen international attention.

The three-day Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum, co-hosted by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), continues today at the Sonora Community Centre. A welcoming reception was held Sunday evening.

Osoyoos Mayor Stu Wells, chairman of the OBWB, said a number of issues are on the table for discussion in these negotiations, including lake levels. However, a key issue could be the quantity of water required to flow south across the border, possibly on a permanent basis.

For the last 25 years, the level of Osoyoos Lake has been controlled by the State of Washington through its Zosel Dam near Oroville, following operating orders set by the International Joint Commission.

These orders are set to expire in February 2013. This forum is intended to give the public an opportunity to provide comment regarding the renewal of the operating orders.

Wells said the impact of such an agreement could have ramifications in communities throughout the Okanagan north of Osoyoos.

"If we go into a major drought situation and we have to provide flow levels, that water is coming from Okanagan Lake," he said.

"If that became part of the operating orders, we could be pumping water over the (Okanagan Lake control) dam at the SS Sicamous in a drought situation to get it down to our international commitment (in the U.S.)."

Water is seen as a major issue in central Washington state, where there is a growing need for increased water storage.

Some areas predict their main aquifers could be out of water within 10 years. One siphoning project currently underway, involves taking water from the Columbia River to Odessa, Wash., east of Wenatchee.

Wells said with climate change, water will be an even more important resource in the years to come.

"Even now, between the droughts, the fires and the floods, it's already changing," he said. "It's happening worldwide. So far, we've been insulated from some of those changes, but how long will that last?"

Other topics of note at the forum include the impact of milfoil infestations in Osoyoos Lake. The U.S. recently announced plans to use chemicals to control the water weed at the south end of the lake near Oroville.

Sockeye salmon runs up the river will also be discussed. The Okanagan Nation Alliance is reintroducing salmon runs further upstream to Skaha Lake.

The forum sessions today will focus on the scientific aspects of water resources, with a look at ensuring sustainability on Tuesday. Representatives from Canada, the U.S. and First Nations are among the featured speakers.