

Diversified water use demands raising conflicts

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

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Management of water use in the entire Okanagan Valley should become part of the orders governing Osoyoos Lake, so that needs for water south of the border can be met, believes at least one scientist reporting to the International Joint Commission.

Michael Barber is a professor at Washington State University and director of the Washington Water Research Centre.

He was speaking Monday at the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum, where more than 150 citizens and scientists from all levels of government and the private sector are gathering this week to discuss the Okanagan basin's supplies of water.

Topics during the three-day forum centre around the operating orders for the level of Osoyoos Lake, which are determined by an agreement reached between the Canadian and U.S. members of the IJC. The last agreement was nearly 25 years ago and it's up for renewal in February 2013.

One of the more contentious proposals for change to those orders comes from a contingent of scientists at WSU, including Barber.

"Basin-wide water management must be used to meet demands. Solutions don't stop at the border. We have to look at managing upstream uses," Barber stated.

In addition, he suggested that alternative sources of water be researched, since Osoyoos Lake is a small storage lake with little room for variance in water level without impacting recreational use or shoreline residents.

"Osoyoos Lake has limited storage capacity for all the demands," he commented, in proposing that flows be the basis for orders governing the trans-boundary waterway instead of lake level.

In making the recommendation, Barber said he looked at what volumes of water would be needed

by 2040 to meet the demand for irrigation, domestic and in-stream/fish needs.

During drought years, he noted that 90 per cent of the demand is for fisheries requirements.

Osoyoos Mayor Stu Wells, who is also chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, said such a proposal concerns him, particularly when in southern Washington officials are looking at diverting water from the Columbia River to replace shortages resulting from aquifers that are drying up, leaving farmers short of water.

Another one of Monday's speakers, Jim Mattison, a consultant with Urban Systems, recommended that the commission amend its definition of what is a drought year, when water level requirements are more flexible, since in half of the past 24 years, a drought has been declared.

In four of those, it was actually rescinded, he noted, but nonetheless, normally droughts don't occur that frequently. His review was conducted jointly with water engineer Don Dobson and fisheries biologist Brian Jantz.

Further complicating the discussion about Osoyoos Lake water levels is the impact the freshet from the Similkameen River has once it enters the Okanagan River downstream from Osoyoos Lake.

In some high-water years, it can actually cause water to back up into Osoyoos Lake.