

Close-up: Shared water



HIGH HOPES
KELOWNA ROCKETEES start their 104th 2011-12 season with a young, skilled team that should be improved in one key area over last year—audience. **A23**

ENTERTAINMENT
THE IRISH RIVERS like nothing better than to see their concert audience go home with a smile on their face and a jump in their step. **A29**

MOTORING
WHILE IT is one of the smaller communities in the world, Mission Bay when it comes to innovation, as is evident in the 2011 Mazda CX-9 SUV that can save seven people. **B1**

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Weekend Edition



Judie Steeves
Capital News

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It's a perspective that became clear during the three-day Okanagan Lake Water Science Forum this

week, which was organized by the Okanagan Basin Water Board and sponsored by the International Joint Commission, the communities of Osoyoos and Crestline, the Okanagan Indian Band and government agencies in both countries.

The theme of the forum was Shared Water, Shared Future.

About 160 citizens, politicians and scientists from both sides of the international boundary listened and learned, asked questions and made

comments with the idea that all the information will be used by the six members of the IJC board in making a decision on what to include in new orders governing the waters of the trans-border Okanagan Lake.

The current orders are up for renewal in February, 2013, after 25 years, and there are many proposals for changes to them, all of which would have some impact on upstream water users in the Okanagan.

See story A.1.

The Okanagan Valley doesn't end at our border with the United States south of Osoyoos, but is part of the much-larger Columbia River Basin.

Judie Steeves/Capital News

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

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Further south in the basin, as aquifers dry up due to expanding populations, U.S. farmers and power users are desperately casting about for new sources of water, while biologists and Indian bands work to restore historic runs of sockeye salmon up the Columbia system into the Okanagan—restoration work which also requires a reliable source of water.

Delegates heard a string of speakers describe why their needs should top the priority list for access to water from the Okanagan, including Washington State Senator Bob Morton, South Okanagan MP Alex Atamanenko; Boundary-Similkameen MLA John Slater, Osoyoos Indian Band Chief Clarence Louie and representatives from the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in Washington State.

Lana Pollack, who chairs the U.S. section of the IJC, says their decision will ultimately be an attempt to balance a multitude of interests, from tourism to agriculture; habitat requirements to drinking water for a growing population on both sides of the border.

“The fact is there's a finite amount of water and increased unknowns due to such factors as climate change,” she notes.

She says her Michigan home near the Great Lakes is water rich, while the Okanagan is a beautiful high desert—with the least water per capita of any water basin in Canada. “There are a lot of big issues on the table,” she admits, adding that the information from the forum will be invaluable as a basis for the commission's decision.

Presentations on each of eight scientific reports commissioned by the IJC were heard at the forum, along with the recommendations from each about how the orders should be amended.

Probably the most controversial for Canadians is the suggestion by a professor from Washington

State University that instead of lake levels, the orders should be based on flows across the border.

Michael Barber was blunt in his presentation: “At some point, growth and climate change impacts will have to be shared between people and fish. Basin-wide water management must be used to meet the demands. The solutions don’t stop at the border.”

Canadians such as Osoyoos mayor and chairman of the OBWB, Stu Wells are concerned that to maintain flows for users south of the border, those on the Canadian side in the Okanagan Valley will have an inadequate supply—particularly in drought years.

Kari Alex, a fisheries biologist with the Okanagan Nation Alliance, told forum delegates that water quality as well as quantity are of vital importance to the return of the salmon to their historic waters in the Okanagan Valley.

The ONA’s mandate is restoration of indigenous species, she said, despite the obstacles that have been put in the way over the years: dams and channelization of the rivers for irrigation and flood control; loss of 88 per cent of the wetlands in the valley; introduction of exotic species of fish such as bass and walleye which compete with native species; and the introduction of invasive species such as mysis shrimp and Eurasian water milfoil.

However, she said a project that began 15 years ago to restore the natural, more-complex habitat along a section of the Okanagan River has now been completed, with dyke setbacks and re-connected oxbows where spawning beds for fish will help improve their survival.

Salmon have now been re-introduced into Skaha Lake and more than half the Columbia River run of sockeye today comes from the Okanagan Valley, she said.

In a prayer at the opening of the forum, Osoyoos Band Elder Modesta Betterton noted, “We can’t live without water; humans, plants and animals all need it.”

“Water is the most important thing.”

The line that is the international boundary between Osoyoos and Oroville divided the Colville Confederated Tribes from the Okanagan Nation, but it doesn’t stop them from working together to restore habitat for salmon on both sides of the border.

Pollack talks about the importance of frequent collaboration on cross-border issues and points to the International Watershed Initiative as a “dispute prevention” tool used by the IJC in some trans-boundary watersheds.

The IJC's Geographic Information Systems coordinator, Michael Laitta, explained that the IWI boards work collaboratively with the IJC and must be holistic, involve an equal number of board members from both countries, as well as bringing an equal amount of money from both countries to the table. "It shepherds communities to confront issues in a bi-national, local way," he explained.

"We've had good results with IWI boards dealing with complex issues."

The idea of this bi-national board resonated with delegates, and in the final panel discussion as the forum drew to a close, commissioner Richard Moy suggested it might be a good way to resolve some of the water issues in the Okanagan.

"The key is good science and public involvement," he said.

Fellow commissioner Lyall Knott, of Vancouver, noted the orders should be a reflection of the community.

Pollack said although the orders are based on science, the commission must also take values into account in making its decision.

All agreed the water science forum helped to hash out the issues the IJC will have to address and to permit ordinary citizens from both sides of the border, as well as scientists, to be heard.

A draft version of the final orders will be available for public comment at some point next year, and public input into what those orders should and should not contain is welcomed now by the commission. Further details are on the web site www.ijc.org.