

Thomson: Drilling for groundwater information in Joe Rich well

By [Steve Thomson - Kelowna Capital News](#)

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Sometimes, it's easy to gaze at beautiful Okanagan Lake and think there's more than enough water to go around. But appearances can be deceiving.

The Okanagan and Southern Interior has several large lakes, but the water supply is also limited by the semi-arid climate. And "limited" is an accurate term.

According to Statistics Canada, the Okanagan has the lowest per capita availability of fresh water in Canada.

Compounding that shortage, we use more water per capita than any other jurisdiction in Canada.

Unfortunately, water shortages have already occurred in some areas, and more are expected to occur in the near future.

For these reasons, Environment Canada designated the Okanagan as a priority water-limited region. Balancing the competing water requirements of the environment, human needs, irrigation, tourism, industry and cultural values has become increasingly difficult.

Of all the local issues that confront Kelowna and the Okanagan, there is perhaps none more serious than water.

Responsible water policy is crucial. It may not be perfect grammar, but it's still accurate to say there's only one water in the Okanagan. Its use—or, if we're not careful, misuse—affects the whole valley.

Of course, water policy can only work with good information. That's where the Okanagan Groundwater Monitoring Project comes in.

Today, I will be pleased to help the Okanagan Basin Water Board celebrate the opening of the Joe Rich monitoring well.

It's part of a vitally important project to monitor the health of groundwater supplies in Joe Rich, and indeed the entire region.

Joe Rich is one of a number of wells being drilled in sensitive aquifers identified as vulnerable.

As you can imagine, a project of this scope requires the cooperation of a lot of organizations and levels of government.

The wells are being drilled in partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Environment, B.C. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Environment Canada and various Okanagan local governments.

The Joe Rich well is being drilled in partnership with the Regional District of Central Okanagan.

This cooperation is vital. Not just because the costs are shared—though that's obviously very helpful—but because the data is shared.

More and better information about groundwater levels will help all levels of government make sensible, informed decisions and water use policies, and protect our aquifers.

The Joe Rich well won't be unique. The Okanagan Groundwater Monitoring Project has plans to develop 15 new observation wells in the Okanagan basin by 2013. Six wells were drilled starting in 2010.

It's a good start. But ultimately, if we are to protect and preserve what is undoubtedly our most precious and precarious resource, information is just the first step.

It will be up to all levels of government to continue to cooperate and manage it.

And, perhaps more importantly, it will be up to individual families and businesses to make responsible decisions about water usage. Because you don't need to drill monitoring wells to know you shouldn't over-water a lawn.

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