

Celebrate water on World Water Day

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

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Wearing moccasins, colourful long skirts and head scarves or bandannas, three generations of the Manuel family drummed and sang the Okanagan song for the water, as part of the opening ceremonies for Canada Water Week at UBCO Tuesday.

Trish Manuel is a knowledge keeper for the Okanagan Nation and explained that the words they sang in the Okanagan language essentially mean that we must take care of the land and the water or we'll be 'the last ones'.

She was joined by her daughter Golden Butterfly and granddaughter One Who Likes Water, each with their own hand drums, while gusty winds send dark clouds scudding across the sky, threatening to present some liquid sunshine on those assembled to celebrate it.

Chief Byron Louis of the Okanagan Nation warned that the streams of the Okanagan basin are over-allocated, and if everyone used their allocation we would run out of water.

With so little water here, we should look to using native landscaping in order to conserve water, he said.

This sub-basin of the Columbia River system used to support 16 million salmon and now there are none that return to Okanagan Lake. "We have been fighting since the early 90s to get the salmon re-introduced here," he said.

"This lake is like an ark for different species," he added.

He suggested everyone think about what the value of their home and their property would be without water. "The loss would hurt every one of us. The beauty of this valley is also what killed it," he commented.

Not only is water essential to people, but also to many species, some unique, that depend on it, he noted.

Louis said he is the third generation of his family to live here, and his grandfather was here when Father Pandosy built the mission in Kelowna.

Lake Country Mayor James Baker expressed his concern about water for food, noting that his municipality is 40 per cent in the Agricultural Land Reserve, yet not all that land has any rights to water. For food security reasons, it's important that all farmland have water, he added.

Kelowna Mayor Walt Gray pointed out the irony that World Water Day is only 19 years old, yet Earth Day has been around for 42 years, "Without water, there would be no Earth Day; there'd be no life."

Speaking for the Okanagan Basin Water Board, Corinne Jackson warned there is less water available per resident here, yet we use twice the water of residents in the rest of the country.

Of that, 24 per cent goes on lawns and gardens, she noted, while the largest amount, 55 per cent is used for agriculture.

"That's working water, that's used to grow food, while that used on lawns is just for esthetic purposes," she pointed out.

Instead, we should consider using drought-tolerant turf and ensure we're irrigating sensibly and not using more than is necessary.

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