

Steeves/Trail Mix: Perhaps the bison won't stomp on the ant this time



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It wasn't a contest, but nonetheless, I see it as a victory for Canada, in which the Yankee bison has made a decision not to step on the lowly ant it looms over.

And, it's largely due to the diligence of and science employed by the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

The international Osoyoos Lake Board of Control has recommended that the orders governing how our water is managed—in terms of how it crosses the international boundary in that lake—not be changed to a regulation governing flows of water from our part of the Okanagan Basin, to the southern part of the Okanogan Basin on the other side of the international boundary.

At least one of the eight scientific reports commissioned by the International Joint Commission, which oversees the board, recommended that the amount of water flowing south across the border become part of the orders which must be renewed by next February.

(As detailed in the report from the Osoyoos board in its recommendations, guaranteeing flows from Osoyoos Lake, would in effect mean guaranteeing flows from Okanagan Lake, because Osoyoos Lake is too small to contain adequate storage for downstream users.)

Yet, the board did not agree with that group of scientists, and it has instead recommended that similar regulations to what have been in place since 1946, be continued, with some minor exceptions.

In many regions south of us in the U.S., water is a very scarce commodity and eyes frequently swivel our way, green with envy at what is seen as an abundance of water, which we should only store until it's needed by them.

It's not being overly dramatic to say that our sovereignty over water is at stake, and during discussions leading up to the recently-released report recommending how the cross-border lake should be managed in the future, there was some pretty inflammatory rhetoric being thrown around.

I attended last September's Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum, organized by the OBWB and sponsored by governments and organizations on both sides of the border. It featured speakers that included politicians, scientists and regular people, from both sides of the border, discussing the issues surrounding governance of Osoyoos Lake.

Following that, the OBWB submitted a letter to the international board recommending it not change the terms of the current operating orders for the trans-border lake, following receipt of a report written by several local scientists providing detailed data and recommending flows not become a basis for new orders. Their science-based report was included with the letter.

Public input into the board's recommendations is now open until the end of August, and two public meetings are set to discuss them: July 24 at 7 p.m. in Oroville and July 25 at 7 p.m. at the Best Western in

Osoyoos.

Read the detailed recommendations at: www.ijc.org

The IJC will then mull over the public input, reports and recommendations and make a decision on renewal of the orders this fall.

While there's nothing cast in stone yet, I'm feeling much more comfortable that reason will prevail and that the new orders will be based on the friendly goodwill and common sense that all neighbours should use in their relations with each other, even if one is 10 times bigger and much more powerful than the other.

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