

## Conserve our water

By Lake Country Calendar

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Residents of the Okanagan share one valley and one water. We also have less water here than anywhere in Canada, but we use more—at least two times more than the average Canadian.

Come summer time, our water use soars—just when we also need water for food and for fish. Recognizing these realities, local governments in the valley have joined forces with the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its outreach program, Okanagan WaterWise, to launch Make Water Work—a valley-wide outdoor water conservation initiative, aimed at encouraging residents to be waterwise.

“The campaign has been a collaborative effort, working with folks from each of these local governments to get the messaging just right,” said Corinne Jackson, OBWB communications director and manager of the Okanagan WaterWise program.

“Our goal is to encourage residents to be more wise with their outdoor water use.

“We’re not telling people not to water, just follow some simple tips to get the most from your water,” added Jackson, noting that the campaign is really aimed at lawn watering.

At least 24 per cent of all Okanagan water is used by residents outdoors, mostly on lawns, she explained.

The campaign includes tips such as: “Don’t mow. Let it grow. Water stays longer when grass is longer,” encouraging residents to leave their grass two to three inches tall to slow evaporation.

Other messages include: “Don’t let water stand around. One inch a week will do,” and “Put water on the night shift. Water between dusk and dawn.”

More tips and information can be found on the website [www.makewaterwork.ca](http://www.makewaterwork.ca).

“It was an easy decision to jump in with this campaign,” said Doug Allin, Peachland’s director of operations.

“The idea of having consistent messaging in the valley was important to us.”

After all, no matter what Okanagan community you live in, the soil is similar, the yard-type is similar, and our watering habits are similar.

“Being more efficient with our water use will benefit all of us,” said Allin.

The decision to join the campaign was also easy for the Regional District of North Okanagan, explained Jennifer Miles, the regional district’s water sustainability coordinator.

Following the drought of 2010 there was resistance to strict water controls, prompting RDNO to create a drought response team to develop a plan to address water needs. The team includes several stakeholders including local businesses and large water users, such as the school district and hospital.

“Public education was one of the recommendations that came out of our drought response team,” noted Miles, adding that there is recognition that promoting and adopting long-term waterwise habits is better than bringing in short-term water restrictions.

“At the same time, our region is very mobile,” said Miles. “Okanagan residents who travel in the valley for work or the holidays are seeing the same message, reinforcing the fact that we really are part of ‘One valley. One water.’ Consistent messaging helps all of us reach the same goal—wise water use.”

“We’re all in this together,” agreed Carolyn Stewart, the City of Penticton’s environmental coordinator.

Communities in the valley have been encouraging water conservation for years, but there hasn’t been a consistent message for a long time, Stewart said.

The purpose of this is to get everyone recognizing that we are all connected. Our watering habits affect

not just our community, but the region as a whole, she added.

"We had a wet spring, but the heat is beginning to hit us now," Jackson added. "The Okanagan has experienced drought in the past and research indicates the region is going to see more of this, with warmer winters, and longer, hotter summers.

"At the same time," she said. "BC Stats estimates the Central Okanagan's population is going to grow by 45 per cent within 25 years, with similar increases in the North and South Okanagan. All of this is going to put greater pressure on our water resources.

"It makes sense to learn to conserve now."

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