



OKANOGAN VALLEY GAZETTE-TRIBUNE

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IJC seeks public comments Lake Osoyoos levels

Meetings to be held in Oroville and Osoyoos

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Constructed in 1987, Zosel Dam replaced a wooden structure that served Zosel's Sawmill. The current dam is used to control water levels on Lake Osoyoos under the Oroville-Tonasket Irrigation District as authorized by the state Department of Ecology. The water level is set by the International Joint Commission which will be holding meetings in Oroville and Osoyoos, B.C. later this month. Photo by Gary DeVon

OROVILLE/OSOYOOS - The International Joint Commission is seeking comments from the public regarding the regulation of water levels of Lake Osoyoos at meetings planned in Oroville and Osoyoos, B.C.

The first of these public meetings will be held on Tuesday, July 24, at the Oroville High School Commons, 1008 Ironwood St., at 7 p.m. The second public meeting will be on Wednesday, July 25 at the Best Western Plus Sunrise Inn at 5506 Main Street, Osoyoos, at 7 p.m.

Since 1946 the commission has regulated water levels in the lake under the Lake Osoyoos Order which provides for the regulation of water levels for the benefit of agriculture, tourism, municipal interests and fishery protection. In 1946 the commission approved alterations to the old wooden Zosel Dam which was downstream from the lake. In 1987, under orders of the IJC the new Zosel Dam was constructed to replace the old dam. The orders set maximum and minimum lake elevations of 911.5 and 909 feet during normal years. During a drought year, water may be stored to lake elevation as high as 913.0 feet.

The current Orders of Approval for Lake Osoyoos are set to expire on Feb. 22, 2013, unless renewed. The commission asked its International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control to present a report of recommendations for renewing the Osoyoos Lake Orders. Drawing on the results of eight studies commissioned by IJC, the board recommends that the scope of a renewed Order remain limited to the management of lake levels with only minor modifications that are primarily related to a revised lake-level rule curve (i.e. prescribed lake water level elevation limits over time per an IJC Order). The board also recommends that the Commission should encourage the continued cooperation between British Columbia and the State of Washington to balance flow

needs across the International Border and downstream of the dam, while respecting goals for Osoyoos Lake elevations and limits on releases that are possible from Okanogan Lake in southern British Columbia.

The Board recommends a public review of a proposed rule curve. The proposed rule curve would provide additional seasonal flexibility in achieving targeted lake levels, and would accommodate multiple uses and users of the lake. The proposed rule curve would also eliminate drought/non-drought declarations and would limit the maximum lake levels to 912.5 feet in the summer. More detailed discussion of the proposed rule curve and the Board's recommendations on renewal of the Order are contained in the Board's Report entitled Recommendations for Renewal of the International Joint Commission's Osoyoos Lake Order now posted on the IJC website at www.ijc.org.

This may be last chance for public input, says local water board

It's been 25 years since there have been such hearings and these could be the last the area ever has, according to the Okanogan Basin Water Board (OBWB). Most of the IJC's water treaty agreements along the 49th parallel are indefinite and it is possible that the one adopted this time around will also be indefinite.

This point is not lost on either Osoyoos Mayor and OBWB Chairman Stu Wells or Oroville City Councilman Walt Hart III.

"A 25-year agreement is not the standard," noted Wells. "I strongly encourage people to come to this meeting and have their voice heard."

Added Hart, "It's very important, especially if we're looking at new Operating Orders that have no date for renegotiation and renewal." For his part, Hart is hoping that the new agreement is not indefinite, adding that it's not easy to foresee future water issues.

Walt Hart, Oroville City Council

"Water is an issue for everyone. We all need it and depend on it. As our population grows and as we see drought and flooding becoming a greater concern in Canada and the U.S....this next agreement must meet the needs of everyone on both sides of the border for years to come."

The public hearings are a follow-up to last September's Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum. The forum brought together IJC, federal, provincial/state and locally-elected officials on both sides of the border, as well as water stakeholders, residents and others to hear the latest scientific research on how best to

manage our shared water supply. It was also an opportunity for informal comments, said Wells. "These public hearings, however, are an opportunity to have your comments entered into the public record and will help form the basis of a new agreement.

"The Okanogan Basin Water Board went on record at the forum and in follow-up correspondence to the IJC that it had strong concerns about guaranteeing flow amounts - something that was being recommended by Washington State University," added Wells. "In the recently released recommendations from the IJC's own Osoyoos Lake Board of Control it does not recommend guaranteed flows, but this is not a time to be complacent."

Hart believes the discussion over flows is not over, adding he thinks it will still be raised at the public hearings. Participation in next week's meetings is a way to make sure that all sides are heard, added the Oroville councilman.

"Water is an issue for everyone. We all need it and depend on it," Hart noted. "As our population grows and as we see drought and flooding becoming a greater concern in Canada and the U.S., we need to go two of two into this recognizing that this next agreement must meet the needs of everyone on both sides of the border for years to come."

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