

## SOUTH OKANAGAN

### Osoyoos Lake's future at stake

*by Grant Scott - Story: 78192  
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Public hearings which could lead to a decision that will affect residents living in the Okanagan and Washington for decades will be held Tuesday July 24 in Oroville Washington and Wednesday July 25 in Osoyoos.

In advance of next week's hearings, elected officials on both sides of the border are encouraging residents to come out and have their say.



*Photo: Contributed - IJC*

The US and Canada have until next February to reach an agreement on the use of Osoyoos Lake.

The International Joint Commission (IJC) is holding hearings to discuss the renewal of Operating Orders for Osoyoos Lake, as the current deal expires February 22, 2013.

The agreement between Canada and the US regulates water levels on Osoyoos Lake to protect against both drought and flooding for the benefit of agriculture, tourism, municipal interests, and fisheries protection on both sides of the border.

Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) Executive Director Dr. Anna Warwick-Sears says the agreement is crucial.

"It's essential to have agreement because the lake crosses the border and we have to have some basic formal structure in place so the Americans aren't doing things on their side of the lake that bother us and that we aren't doing things that bother them."

The two countries have had similar agreements in place along the entire border for over a century. It's been 25 years since an agreement was reached for Osoyoos Lake and this new agreement could be fundamentally different.



*File photo: Grant Scott*

Dr. Anna Warwick Sears

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.

"Probably it would have a different process, not just a timing out process but having to go through a formal notification process to re-open (the agreement). In some ways it's better because it's more flexible, but in other ways it might give less security."

Warwick-Sears added there's been a long history of co-operation between the two sides.

"The towns of Oroville and Osoyoos work very well together and there's a real commitment on both sides of the border to keep things smooth and to try and find equitable solutions. This is really a very rare opportunity to be involved in an international decision making process."

Osoyoos Mayor and OBWB Chair Stu Wells agrees.

"These public hearings are an opportunity to have your comments entered into the public record and will help form the basis of a new agreement."

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.

"The Okanagan 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. 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," says Wells.

South of the border, Oroville councillor Walt Hart is also encouraging the public to become involved.

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

The first of the two public hearings will be held July 24, 2012, 7:00 p.m., at the Oroville High School at 1008 Ironwood Street in Oroville.

The next night, July 25, the hearing switch to the Best Western Plus Sunrise Inn at 5506 Main Street in Osoyoos starting at 7:00 p.m.

Recommendations from the International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control and draft wording on a renewed Operating Order are available for review and comment. Both documents are posted on the [IJC website](#).

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