

New money announced to help wetlands areas in the Okanagan

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The B.C. Wildlife Federation is applauding a couple different funding announcements that will go towards an Okanagan-valley wide effort to create a water strategy.

Funding has been approved for a trio of Okanagan Basin Water Board projects to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive water data collection program and valley-wide wetlands strategy.

Rick Simpson, co-chair of BC Wildlife Federation's Region 8 fisheries committee as well as a member of the Lake Country-based Oceola Fish and Game Club, was pleased with the funding announcement and noted its significance.

"Wetlands are an important part of our aquatic eco-system, responsible for filtering out pollutants from our water, but they're often overlooked and now 85 per cent of them are gone," he said. "Often they get drained or paved over. Instead, we need to protect what's here, enhance the wetlands, and find a way to create more. This is great news for the Okanagan."

Recognizing the importance of data collection when it comes to wetlands, Environment Canada has awarded \$30,000 to the Water Board to re-establish two strategic stream-flow hydrometric monitoring stations.

"Good water management begins with good water measurement. The first step in preparing for floods or droughts is to know how much water is flowing in the streams," said It's important information for residents and water managers, for farmers, and for those concerned with fish," said water board executive director Anna Warwick Sears explained. "This information has immediate value, and when we can track flows over time, we are better at predicting what the future will bring. Right now, about half of the stream flow stations are being run by independent managers. In this time of tight budgets, we have to share data to get the most value out of our combined efforts."

Another \$95,000 in funding has been allocated by the Union of B.C. Municipalities' Gas Tax Innovations Fund to develop a single database where stream-flow measurements from across the valley can be collected and accessed.

"I commend the OBWB for its ongoing leadership in addressing our water issues," said Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan. "Water is vital to our existence. Managing this valuable resource efficiently and in a sustainable manner will allow the Okanagan to grow, improving the lives of the people in our communities. Accurate information is invaluable and now all Okanagan stream flow measurement data will be available through a single database."

Environment Canada also approved \$35,000 to create Phase 1 of an Okanagan Wetlands Strategy. The strategy includes compiling existing wetlands information, and establishing a steering committee to guide development of a valley-wide protection plan.

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