

Property purchase allows wetlands project at Okanagan Falls waste water treatment plant to proceed

By Steve Arstad

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The Regional District Okanagan Similkameen board of directors approved the purchase of property adjacent the Okanagan Falls waste water treatment plant to provide additional wetlands filtration.

Image Credit: Contributed

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OKANAGAN FALLS - The Regional District Okanagan Similkameen is planning to "polish" sewage effluent on piece of property adjacent to the Okanagan Falls wastewater treatment plant as approval for purchase of a \$195,000 acreage known as the McCall property was passed by the board earlier this week.

A portion of the 10-acre property will be used for a wetlands filtration project that is expected to provide additional filtering to treated water leaving the plant in Okanagan Falls.

When the wastewater treatment plant was constructed, original plans called for treated effluent to be discharged into wetlands across the Okanagan River channel, but concerns from the Canadian Wildlife Service over the impacts of the effluent on amphibians and turtles in the marsh resulted in rejection of this option.

With the purchase of the McCall property, the regional district expects to use approximately seven acres as a constructed wetland for the Okanagan Falls treatment facility.

The additional step is anticipated to address increasing concerns about emerging contaminants such as endocrine disrupting chemicals that originate in pharmaceuticals and other products.

The regional district has been researching residual endocrine disruptors in Okanagan waterways through a funding partnership that includes the Okanagan Basin Water Board, the Okanagan Indian Band, Health Canada, Interior Health Authority and the provincial Environment Ministry. The extra filtration and retention time as they pass through the wetlands is anticipated to give endocrine disruptors more time to break down and dissipate.

Okanagan Falls director Tom Siddon called the project a research laboratory, saying the property purchase was a worthwhile investment that also needed additional funding from gas tax funding in order to conduct research. He noted the Okanagan Basin Water Board, who spoke in favour of the program a year ago, might find funds for research through its small grants program, or the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council through its access to a number of funding programs.

Siddon also felt the project could become an economic generator with research teams from other regions coming to study the wetlands project.

"I think this is something that not only other cities are not doing, but we're going to learn a lot from this," he says, adding the research had world wide significance.

Public works manager Roger Huston says the regional district recently received verbal approval from the Agricultural Land Commission for the purchase.

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