

Okanagan Water Governance Workshop - May 22/08

An Overview of Water Management Issues

From Agenda: An overview of the current water management issues in the Okanagan reflecting ecological, economic, social and institutional considerations.

Introductory comments & brief overview of workshop goals as I understand them

- Acknowledge Syilx people, conference organizers, other participants
- Personal background in natural resource management issues (fisheries and agricultural systems in Canada and Papua New Guinea)
- Understanding water as a “commons”
- Today’s goal: to develop a shared understanding of how water can be more effectively managed on a regional/watershed basis (Okanagan/Similkameen)

Water management issues: briefly note general areas of concern

- Ecological sustainability (loss of biodiversity; damage to wetlands/riparian zones)
- water quality (emerging contaminants; cryptosporidium; source water protection)
- water scarcity (as outcome of development, climate change)
- water equity (in relation to aboriginal rights, agricultural interests)
- international agreements (Boundary Waters Treaty, Columbia River Treaty, NAFTA)
- some specific issues in need of immediate attention, e.g. groundwater regulation
- other long term issues, e.g. water licensing (prior appropriation, beneficial use, etc.)
- *effective water governance institutions are necessary for all of the above.*

Some Basic Principles

- many have been well articulated by **OBWB in their draft “Sustainable Water Strategy”**
- an additional principle: **manage people more and water less**, i.e. we should interfere with natural water and ecosystem functions as little as possible
 - e. g. water balance model – allow rain to percolate through ground on its way to lakes, creeks, etc. rather than be captured by storm water drainage systems
 - e. g. the Environmental Water Reserve concept
- **Use water as an instrument of sustainable development** - not rampant growth
 - Historically water has been used as an instrument of development – not a good idea if development is controlled for benefit of specific interest groups only

- *The Okanagan region is remarkable for the extent to which the economy is water-dependent – this applies to virtually all economic sectors (notably agriculture, housing, tourism and related service industries)*
- Our approach to water governance should be consistent with our collective vision of what the Okanagan is and will become
 - Need to identify our common interests and build from there
 - Strong, resilient ‘natural’ environment
 - Respect for rights of First Nations
 - Water equity (water as a commons)
 - Protection of agricultural land and farm culture
 - Support for tourism/recreation/housing/retirement industries and synergy of these with the above
 - Recognizing the ecological limits of the “oasis aesthetic”.

Comments on water governance & Institutional design

- OBWB provides a very positive governance model for the Okanagan
 - Effective track record
 - Water Stewardship Council provides for input from many interest groups
 - Answerable to local level government on a region wide basis
 - Should have enhanced authority, budget and staff
- Institutional design is a complex and under-researched area
 - UBC Okanagan faculty and students can hopefully devote more resources to this set of issues in the future
 - Management of water as a commons requires different types of support at different levels of government (federal vs. provincial vs. local) - a ‘nested’ arrangement of governance institutions
 - Thus provincial government also needs reconsider its approach to governance.

Closing Comments

- “The world is watching”...
- A wonderful opportunity exists in the Okanagan to do more than solve our own problems – we could provide a model for other regions that are facing similar issues
 - watershed wide management model
 - model of how to protect and manage agricultural land base
 - manage rural/urban interface as an ideal rather than problematic living environment
 - alliances among government/first nations/university/private sector/citizen groups