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COMMUNITY

Full agenda for Okanagan Basin Water Board

by [Staff Writer - Vernon Morning Star](#)

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Considerable work continues within the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

Among the issues facing the agency are population growth, civic and federal elections, new B.C. water regulations, climate change and recent court rulings recognizing aboriginal title.

"This past year has seen movement on many important projects," said Anna Warwick Sears, executive director.

"These include: providing an Okanagan voice to the new B.C. Water Sustainability Act; the start of a wetland strategy for the Okanagan, aimed at addressing the steep decline in these systems that protect water quality, prevent flooding and recharge groundwater; continued work to prevent a costly and devastating infestation of invasive mussels; improvements to control aquatic weeds; the re-establishment of monitoring stations to measure stream flows; work towards a tool to improve the way water managers make licencing decisions, and much more."

Looking forward, there is much work to do, but there are also many unknowns, says Warwick Sears.

"We have to act deliberately and pay attention to changing conditions – whether we're talking weather, financial, or political. We don't want to waste time or resources," she said.

Recognizing all of the changes ahead, the OBWB invited Deborah Curran, municipal lawyer and a professor in environmental law and sustainability, to speak to the board recently.

"There are four things local governments need to be aware of," said Curran.

"One, the Water Sustainability Act is moving towards groundwater licencing. This will affect local governments since many communities use ground-water and also the regulations will impact surface water licencing.

“Two, the act recognizes the need to meet environmental flow needs, or water for fish. In the future, water licences may be changed to meet water needs of fish. Three, aboriginal rights and title are likely to have implications for water entitlements. And four, they need to be aware of the importance of negotiation with other users and rights holders.

“The trend for water disputes is to negotiate by having everyone cut back and develop water sustainability plans. Negotiating water use in a regional context, in the Okanagan and elsewhere, will win out at the end of the day.”