

Local News posted November 7, 2014 by Stacy Penner

\$100,000 Funding Announced for Okanagan Wetlands

Environment Canada is funding two years of wetland restoration and rehabilitation in the Okanagan.

Together, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) announced \$100,000 funded by Environment Canada for Phase 2 of the Okanagan Wetlands Strategy and significant work by the ONA.

Phase 1 was focused on data collected, public outreach, prioritization, and mapping Okanagan wetlands, but Phase 2 is taking a more hands-on approach. In Phase 2, organizers are planning to complete six different projects, with three finished by March 31, 2015 and the other three by March 31, 2016.



Fascieux Creek Wetland, the site for the major wetlands announcement. (Photo Credit: KelownaNow)

Environment Canada has given OBWB \$50,000 for the two-year project management, and another \$50,000 was given to ONA for both ONA-specific wetland projects and projects in collaboration with OBWB. Some of the work by the ONA will involve supporting the Western Painted Turtle on the Penticton Indian Reserve near Penticton's airport.

"The Okanagan People have a strong relationship with the water," said Penticton Indian Band Chief Jonathan Kruger. "Protecting and enhancing wetlands is vital to maintaining that relationship. This project is part of the larger water strategy for the Nation and it is through partnerships like this and collaboration that we will continue to move forward to ensure there is water for tomorrow."

"Wetlands, once considered a nuisance and a waste of valuable land, are an important part of our community," said OBWB Chair Doug Findlater. More than 85 per cent of the Okanagan's wetlands and natural riparian areas are no longer there and other areas are still at risk.



The team behind the wetlands projects: L to R Chief Jonathan Kruger, Project Manager Jillian Tamblin, Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan, OBWB Water Stewardship Director Nelson Jatef, and West Kelowna mayor/OBWB Chair Doug Findlater. (Photo credit: KelownaNow)

The first project has just begun with a restoration project at McLachlan Lake, according to Phase 2 Project Manager Jillian Tamblin. The wetland there was extremely dry and damaged by cattle and off-road vehicles. Fencing has since gone up to protect the area, and the hope is that the wetlands will then begin to restore.

The other projects are yet to be determined, as organizers are prioritizing different areas around the Okanagan. The first year will involve the Okanagan Wetlands Strategy Project collaborating with existing projects, while the second year will involve more in-depth, larger scale projects.

Plans for the third phase of the Okanagan Wetlands Strategy involve developing a comprehensive document informed by the project for others to reference in future work.



Ducks at Fascieux Creek Wetland. (Photo Credit: KelownaNow)



The McLachlan Lake Project in Garnet Valley, close to Peachland. (Photo Credit: OBWB Jillian Tamblin)