

For Immediate Release

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Kelowna, BC

MEDIA RELEASE:

OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD TO CREATE A WEB-BASED WATER USE REPORTING SYSTEM FOR THE VALLEY

“We can’t manage what we don’t measure.” BC’s *Living Water Smart Plan*

Funding Announcement: On September 24th, 2009, the Okanagan Basin Water Board received \$154,000 in Canada/BC Infrastructure Funding to produce a web-based water use reporting tool for the Okanagan valley.

Background: The Okanagan has the lowest per person water availability in Canada but we don’t have a system to track how much water we use. This project will develop a streamlined web-based system for water suppliers and other large water users to record how much water they use each month, evaluate changes from year to year, and look at how their water use compares to other areas. Water planners will also use the system – the water use data will help them manage drought and water shortages, and plan for increased demand from climate change and population growth. The reporting system will give a clear picture of how much water is used in the valley as a whole.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board will create the reporting system through a partnership with water suppliers, local government planners, and BC ministries. It will be designed to bring together information from all large water users: licensed and unlicensed, public and private, surface and groundwater. With this information, the Water Board will be able to help communities match their water demands to water supplies, find funding, and identify critical areas within the valley. Although it is being developed to meet the needs of the Okanagan, this tool can be customized for specific regions or industries in other parts of British Columbia.

Project Outcomes:

1. **Water security in the Okanagan:** Water security means knowing how much water you have and how much water you need. The new reporting system will help track how community water needs change through time, help resolve conflicts, and help plan for the future. It will be integrated with the water supply and demand project being completed for the valley.
2. **Better information for water users:** Users will be able to access their own water data and reports on water trends and efficiency improvements. The system will generate summary reports, time series trend graphs, pie charts and bar graphs that can be printed and downloaded for digital or paper filing. It will also create summaries of how water is used in local regions and the watershed as a whole, allowing users to compare water trends.

3. **Better management of water use information.** The system will eliminate duplication of effort, systems, and costs and eliminate repetitive requests for the same information from water planners and BC ministries.
4. **A modernized method to manage water records.** The system will be efficient, user-friendly, fast, easy, and streamlined. It will also be able to accommodate automated updates from telemetry-based water meters and other technological advances.
5. **Improve data quality.** A water management and use study, completed for the Okanagan in 2008, found that out of 57 major purveyors in the valley, only 17 had reliable data for the period from 1996-2006; and extensive estimation was needed to fill information gaps. This system will create a uniform structure and standards for water use reporting;
6. **Increase the reporting interval to monthly.** The current system of annual reporting does not allow water users or planners to track important trends in seasonal water use, and how those trends vary with environmental conditions;
7. **Include groundwater.** Groundwater pumping will be reported in the same way as surface water. Where groundwater is not currently measured, irrigation calculators can be integrated into the tool to estimate groundwater use;
8. **Future scalability.** The architecture of the system will be designed to accommodate future needs. For example, in a small, drought-prone watershed, all individual households could be linked into the system with real-time data reporting. During droughts, users could log on and monitor community water use to track water conservation needs.
9. **Future integration with water quality reporting:** Water suppliers are now required to separately report water quality information to health authorities. The water use reporting system will be designed to allow development of a one-stop shop for reporting water quality and water use in the future.

Implementing this streamlined water use reporting system will help Okanagan communities build a stronger economy and sustainable environment. Individual suppliers will have more powerful tools for tracking their water trends over time. As a valley, we will be better able to prepare for drought, share water in times of shortages, and identify critical areas where supplies are not meeting demand.

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For more information on the Okanagan Basin Water Board, please visit www.obwb.ca.