

Climate change initiative unveiled



Creation of Canada's first Regional Adaptation Collaborative, in response to climate change, is a creation of various levels of government as well as other agencies. At the funding announcement for this initiative on Monday were (from left) Stockwell Day, Conservative MP for Okanagan-Coquihalla; Anna Warwick Sears, director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board; David Marshall, director of the Fraser Basin Council; and Ben Stewart, Liberal MLA for Westside-Kelowna.

Judie Steeves/Capital News

By [Judie Steeves - Kelowna Capital News](#)

Published: **January 26, 2010 6:00 PM**

Updated: **January 26, 2010 6:01 PM**

We can't change drought, flooding and snow levels, so we must adapt to the forecast that will more frequently affect our lives, says Anna Warwick Sears, the executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

She was speaking at a press conference held Monday to announce that the Fraser Basin Council will be the lead agency for the first B.C. Regional Adaptation Collaborative, which received a total of \$6.9 million in funding for 13 linked projects to be used by 18 partners over the next few years all designed to help B.C. communities adapt to climate change.

The announcement was made jointly by by Okanagan-Coquihalla MP Stockwell Day, who is also now the head of the federal treasury board, and Westside-Kelowna MLA Ben Stewart, B.C. Minister of Citizens' Services.

The funding will include nearly \$300,000 for the Okanagan Basin Water Board to complete the third phase of the Okanagan Valley's Water Supply and Demand Study an amount that will be matched by funds from the OBWB and other agencies.

The second phase of that study is just wrapping up, the culmination of three years of work to include some of the most comprehensive data ever collected on a single watershed, funded with a total budget of \$2.5 million from several levels of government.

"There's been much focussed on mitigation, but little on adaptation," said Sears, adding some things can't be prevented, so we must adapt.

The question is how best to adapt and what will our priorities be, particularly in terms of the water-short Okanagan, she explained.

“The Okanagan Valley is among areas with the highest drought risk in Canada, with some of the fastest population growth, and an economy that is heavily dependent on water for the agriculture, tourism and retirement industries,” she said.

“Despite the known risks, very little work has been done to ensure the reliability of supplies for the future—until now.”

The announcement for funding to continue the work is very significant for the Okanagan, she said.

Day said collaboration is needed in order to tackle watershed challenges, and that doesn't happen easily when a lot of different groups are involved.

Stewart lauded the work of the OBWB for the work it has already done.

“It has set the gold standard for the province,” he said. The OBWB is composed of regional district directors from all the districts in the valley.

FBC executive director David Marshall brought out the old Mark Twain quote that: ‘Whisky (or wine, he said, since the announcement was at Quails’ Gate Winery) is for drinking; water is for fighting over.’

With some preparation now, we should be able to reduce the conflicts over water in the future, he said.

This is a true collaborative effort, with a wide range of users involved in working to reduce future strife over water.

OBWB water stewardship director Nelson Jatel said this money will help them connect the science, the policy and the people. How and when water conservation impacts agriculture is one question people must discuss; and how much water is wasted on landscaping.

“Agricultural use of water makes money; using it on the landscaping doesn't,” he commented.

“This funding will help us prepare for the future.”

jsteeves@kelownacapnews.com