

Kelowna News



File Photo: Kelly Hayes - Castanet

Okanagan at risk of water shortage

*by Wayne Moore - Story: 53548
Mar 26, 2010 / 4:15 pm*

A quarter of all water used in the Okanagan is used for cosmetic purposes.

That's among the most startling findings in a water study released Friday by the Okanagan Basin Water Board and the Ministry of Environment.

The Okanagan Water Study and Demand Study, three years in the works, shows 24% of all water used in the Okanagan is on domestic yards and landscaping while another 7% is utilized for indoor domestic purposes.

Anna Warwick-Sears, Executive Director of the OBWB says in her view, that was the most surprising aspect of the study.

"A lot of people point the finger at agriculture and you think about how many acres there are of agricultural land in the Okanagan. We think of ourselves as an agricultural community but we use on our lawns half of what agriculture uses," says Warwick-Sears.

"All that water is just for cosmetic purposes. That for me was the biggest jaw dropper."

Warwick-Sears says people in the Okanagan need to realize that we do not have an endless supply of water at our fingertips.

"Water in the valley is overestimated. People think that because we have this big blue lake outside that we have plenty of water that is unlimited. Really, we can only use the amount that is replenished each year."

She says there are no guarantees the amount being replenished each year is the amount we are used to using.

The study shows that the Okanagan has less fresh water available per person than anywhere else in Canada, while at the same time we use more than twice as much water as the average Canadian.

On average, each Okanagan resident uses 675 litres of water per day, most of which is used domestically during the spring and summer months.

The Canadian average is 340 to 350 litres per person per day.

"We really have to get that message out that we have to pay attention. We need a major shift in how we think and deal with water," says OBWB chair Stu Wells.

"The results that are being presented today are going to show where we are and take us into the future. It's the supply and the demand and how we are going to use that information in planning our communities and what is going to happen."

Warwick-Sears added that some areas within the Okanagan Basin have already experienced water shortages.

Those shortages, she says, are expected to occur more frequently and more widely in the future.

She says the study shows this will present significant challenges as the population grows and as we see effects of climate change.

While it is predicted that precipitation levels will remain relatively constant, Warwick-Sears says it is believed the biggest change is when the precipitation will fall.

"The rain will come in the winter, it will melt the snow and it will all run off and go down into the States and we'll be left with pretty low streams in the summer months."

 [Key findings of Phase Two Study. \(this is a pdf file\)](#)