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Water supply dominates agenda

By [Richard Rolke - Vernon Morning Star](#)

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A study into the Okanagan's water supply is reinforcing concerns the valley is running dry.

The report, done by the Okanagan Basin Water Board, looked at water availability in the region, as well as the potential impact of climate change.

"It appears to be getting drier based on the information we have," said Al Cotsworth, manager of the Greater Vernon water utility.

Records show that over the last decade, there were only two years where the snowpack on the Aberdeen Plateau — a major source of water for Greater Vernon — was above average.

"To have it eight (below) and two (above) tells me there may be something else going on," said Cotsworth.

The Aberdeen Plateau, though, drains into the Shuswap system, while the Okanagan basin — Kalamalka Lake — only accounts for one-third of Greater Vernon's water.

Geography aside, Cotsworth is apprehensive over water supply for the entire valley.

"The study shows there's really not much water to give out if any," he said.

The study looked at urban and agricultural use, groundwater and stream flows over three years.

Through a web-based search tool, officials could view scenarios that will impact future water supply and demand, including climate change and population growth.

“When you stand back and look at the results, ultimately they point to the need for conservation,” said Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB executive director.

“The reason for this is a merging of some important distinctions in the Okanagan. First, it is a very dry place. Second, we have less fresh water available per person in the Okanagan basin than anywhere else in Canada. And yet, the average Okanagan resident uses more than two times as much water as the average Canadian.”

Valley residents use an average of 675 litres of water a day, double the national average.

Fifty-five per cent of all water use is for agriculture, while outdoor domestic consumption is 24 per cent.

Domestic indoor use accounts for seven per cent, followed by golf course, commercial/ industrial and parks.

Cotsworth believes Greater Vernon water consumption is closer to the national average.

“Urban areas in Vernon and Coldstream have gone down substantially since the implementation of water meters,” he said, adding that showing people how much water they use has led to conservation.

The next step for OBWB is to use the information from the study to focus on policy and planning tools for adaptation to climate change.

“Now the work begins to determine what we can all do to protect this valuable resource — from residents being conscious about their water use, to local governments planning for its future,” said said Warwick Sears.

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