

Embracing the new reality



Tolko's woodlands manager, Murray Wilson, says the Terrace Mountain wildfire burned so hot the soils now can't absorb rainfall because they're bereft of organic material, so there are concerns about slides with runoff. Wildfires and beetle kill are just some of the climate change impacts the company is dealing with.

Judie Steeves/Capital News

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

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Kelowna city manager Ron Mattiussi is confident the city is well-positioned to deal with climate change, but he questions whether its residents are.

"I believe we know what we need to do; the question is whether the community does," he told a group of forestry professionals during a panel discussion entitled "Climate's changing, things are happening in our watershed—Are we ready for it?"

For instance, he says the city is trying to wean its citizens off using so much water, but he's not confident they're going to fully embrace the new xeriscaping standards.

"We're already getting pushback," he said.

“We’re doing drought management plans. The question is, is society ready to change? Change hurts. Being comfortable is easier,” he added.

He gave the Okanagan Basin Water Board full marks for doing such great work, and said he is glad to now have scientific data available to show where the Okanagan basin is at in terms of water availability and the demand for it.

Tolko’s woodlands manager, Murray Wilson said the company operates on 765,000 hectares in the Okanagan, of which 140,000 hectares are in 28 watersheds, involving 1,600 separate water licences.

Last year’s Terrace Mountain forest fire impacted 10,000 ha in Tolko’s tree farm licence, he told delegates to the annual meeting of the Association of B.C. Forest Professionals.

He said it was such a significant burn that pine trees simply disintegrated, and the soils left behind are so hydrophobic that even when it’s raining, you can kick up the duff layer with your foot. The moisture doesn’t soak in.

That’s a real concern because of the potential for slides, particularly on some of the steep slopes that were burned, he said.

While he says they can’t control the impacts on riparian areas, they have gone in and put in larger pipes under roads.

The impacts of mountain pine beetle in their operating area is not new, even though this is the most devastating cycle ever seen in this province because warmer winter weather has failed to control their numbers in recent years.

He noted they have taken steps to reduce the impact of dead pines by minimizing roads, increasing the drainage control on road systems, enlarging stream buffer zones and planting.

More tree patches and single trees are left behind to help stabilize logged areas, he said, and in some areas spruce and balsam is being left behind.

However, he predicted that water issues will increase as a result of climate change and the impacts of the massive infestation of pine beetles.

Pine beetles are probably the greatest impact we’ll see from climate change in the short term, commented hydrologist Don Dobson.

That’s expected to result in more water running off more frequently and faster, with the massive losses of forest cover.

He wondered whether stream crossings are adequate for higher flows, and he warned there will be an increased risk of wildfire with the forest full of huge fuel loads of dying pine and warmer

temperatures.

There are questions about whether the hydrology of the watersheds will behave as predicted, he said.

There hasn't been much research, and there are not nearly enough hydrometric stations in place around the Okanagan basin to monitor stream flows, he said.

"We need the data to manage the resource," he commented.

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