

Water quality strategy sought

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

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The Bear Creek Drinking Water Advisory Committee has stated in its terms of reference that protection of water quality is the paramount objective in management of that watershed for recreation.

In its first meeting April 21, that committee also agreed that it would provide recommendations for adoption of best management practices to guide the continued implementation of the Bear Creek Recreation Management Project.

Chairman Peter Walters, assistant deputy minister in the tourism development division of the tourism ministry, said there is no time frame for the committee's work, and he has no idea how long the current moratorium on new construction and closure of trails in the Bear Creek area will continue.

However, he says the committee will be dissolved on completion of the terms of reference, although it could be reactivated to address any issues with implementation.

The committee was formed to review the ministry's response to the direction on drinking water quality provided by Interior Health in a letter last summer.

Interior Health has warned water utilities that multi-barrier approaches to water treatment are needed, beginning with protection of a high quality water source.

Key to managing threats to drinking water are land-use practices that support natural watershed function and a focus on activities occurring in sensitive areas, according to IH.

Committee members include Doug Krogel of the Integrated Land Management Bureau, West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater, Dr. Paul Hasselback of Interior Health, Darren Schlamp of the Westbank Irrigation District, John Byland of the Lakeview Irrigation District, Bernie Bauer, chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Stewardship Council and Ken Cunningham of the environment ministry.

Walters said a date for the next meeting hasn't yet been set.

A number of questions from the first meeting need to be answered at that meeting, including regarding the standards for Water Act approval for a bridge that's been built across Bald Range Creek and the future location of a trail deemed too close to a domestic water storage lake.

As well, Walters said there will be integration of a variety of uses in the area on a single map and monitoring will be updated to include recommendations regarding tours.

He said the bridge across Bald Range Creek must meet environment ministry standards as well as those of the ministry of forests.

The problem that led to formation of the committee earlier in the year is communications, he noted.

There must be communication with water utilities regarding the Bear Creek Recreation Management Project, he said.

Up to now, the Okanagan Trail Riders' Association, which is spearheading construction of more sustainable trails for dirt bikers and ATV riders in the Bear Creek area off Bear Main forest service road, have frequently crossed swords with the water utilities for whom that is a domestic watershed.

There is a history of unmanaged trail use in the Bear Creek area, which includes 35,000 hectares in the watersheds of both the Westbank and Lakeview Irrigation Districts, both of which are set to be taken over by the new municipality of West Kelowna before year-end.

In 2001, it was established as a B.C. recreation site, bringing it under the forest recreation regulations governed by the tourism ministry.

In addition to the estimated 300 km of user-built trails and 800 km of forest roads in the area, there are now 450 km of fire guards as well, along with a wide variety of user groups.

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