

## LOCAL

### Under half of Okanagan Lake's shore remains in natural state



By Steve MacNaull  
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Along Okanagan Lake's shoreline, there are 2,718 docks, 1,799 retaining walls, and 939 other waterfront and beach modifications and man-made rock piles.

It all adds up to 57 per cent of the lake's 289-kilometre perimeter being disturbed by humans in one way or another.

All these facts and figures are contained in a first-ever foreshore mapping inventory of the lake by the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program, a group made up of the Okanagan Basin Water Board and 33 municipalities, regional districts, provincial and federal ministries, and non-governmental groups.

With all those man-made structures along the lakeshore, you might think the group is sounding the alarm over development of the shoreline, but it's not. Rather, program co-ordinator Carolina Restrepo-Tamayo offers officials a gentle warning.

"The lake is in good health," Restrepo-Tamayo said. "We are not against development, because people need and want access to the lake. But what we're saying is 57 per cent of the foreshore is already disturbed, so we have to take that into consideration to make better decisions in the future to protect the lake."

Protecting the lake is essential because it is the Valley's greatest resource as a source of water for people and agriculture, a transportation route, recreational corridor and a key ingredient in the beautiful look and feel of the Okanagan.

With the foreshore mapping done, the report will be used as a guide to help various levels of government, lakeshore landowners and the public make decisions about the future of the lake.

For instance, the cities on the lake, from Vernon, Kelowna and West Kelowna to Peachland, Summerland and Penticton, have jurisdiction over foreshores above the high-water mark. That means developers and waterfront property owners have to go through the municipality for rules and final decisions on where lakefront homes can be built, if a pool can be put in and if a lawn is too close to the lake for fertilizer leaking or habitat damage.

The provincial government doesn't allow retaining walls below the high-water mark. Licensing docks is a provincial jurisdiction.

And fisheries concerns and boat traffic on the lake are under the federal government.

The Central Okanagan has had a foreshore inventory since 2005. However, it was important to get one for all of the lake, says City of Kelowna environment and land use manager Todd Cashin.

"Integrated land management for all levels of government is needed to protect the lakeshore, the lake and species that use the lake," he said.

Cashin says one of the biggest disturbances to foreshore that people do innocently is pick rocks from the beach and shallow waters to pile to the side in order to get a clear path to the beach and water for lounging and swimming.

"One instance of this may not be a big deal," he said, "but many of them - and there are a lot around Okanagan Lake - can change drift and flow and erosion and accumulation and change habitat for fish."

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