

Close-up: The Okanagan's receding shoreline

GOING RENTAL
THE LONG-TRUBLED Conservatory project in Glenora is out of mudBulls again, as a new developer wants to turn it into a rental property. **A6**

SPORTS
KELOWNA wheelchair athlete Frank Row has zoomed to the top of the rankings for his sport, having won three gold medals at the recent Asian Pacific Games in Kariya. **A21**

ENTERTAINMENT
KELOWNA MUSEUM is planning a big party to mark the 150th anniversary of the institution, which was first opened back in 1866. **A24**

FRIDAY August 19, 2011
The Central Okanagan's Best Local Newspaper
www.okanaganpress.com

CAPITAL news Weekend Edition

RECEDING SHORELINE

Wade Paterson
A Youngster's Message
OKANAGAN PRESS

Fingert and retired business people are working as hard as they can to restore the shoreline in the Okanagan. This beach and shoreline are public areas and should be protected from private interests.

Private docks, public docks, lawns and retaining walls are scattered the length of Okanagan Lake. Unwise development is so pervasive that less than half of Okanagan Lake's shoreline remains unobstructed.

At the current rate of development, existing unobstructed shoreline could be encroached within the next generation.

That fact raises questions for the residents and decision makers in each community that borders the lake shore. Where will shoreline loss leave public enjoyment of the lake? What can be done to prevent the entire Okanagan from becoming disturbed?

See story A.1.



ENHANCING beach access for youngsters to enjoy has sometimes come at the expense of Okanagan Lake's natural shoreline habitat.

Enhancing beach access for youngsters to enjoy has sometimes come at the expense of Okanagan Lake's natural shoreline habitat.

Douglas Farrow/Contributor

By [Wade Paterson - Kelowna Capital News](#)

Published: August 19, 2011 5:00 AM

Updated: August 19, 2011 10:26 AM

Elegant and refined homes perch effortlessly on the most expensive real estate in the Okanagan. Civic beaches and intensive-use public areas punctuate the private homes.

Private docks, public docks, berms and retaining walls are scattered the length of Okanagan Lake. Human development is so pervasive that less than half of Okanagan Lake's shoreline remains untouched.

At the current rate of development, existing untouched shoreline could be consumed within the next generation.

That fact raises questions for the residents and decision makers in each community that touches the lake shore. When will foreshore loss harm public enjoyment of the lake? What can be done to prevent the entire foreshore from becoming disturbed?

Okanagan Lake does not have a cohesive jurisdiction. Lakefront development decisions and building permits are made at the municipal or regional district level.

The province dictates Crown land, First Nations have their own approach and the federal government maintains its role through Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

The Foreshore Inventory and Mapping/Aquatic Habitat Index (FIM), released in June, gave Okanagan Lake shoreline jurisdiction municipalities and regional districts baseline data on the state of every inch of Okanagan Lake's shoreline.

The study was supported and funded through all three levels of government, including almost every regional and municipal government touching on the lake.

The executive summary of the report states that it's possible to manage the shoreline, and natural areas surrounding it, in a sustainable manner.

The report says the most direct line of decision-making lies in the council chambers and bylaws of the municipalities and regional districts.

During one report presentation to Lake Country council this week, biologists pointed out the ugly truth: A \$120 fine for illegal shoreline infill from the Fisheries and Oceans Canada is a negligible nuisance on a multimillion dollar home.

Permitting processes have much more direct and dramatic impact on building practices than the current system.

Within the opening pages of the FIM, the authors make clear the decision to protect remaining foreshore needs to be made: "The current trend of reliance on Best Management Practices and voluntary compliance with the regulations and guidance documents are not resulting in the

required protection of important fish and wildlife habitats along the shoreline.”

This report acts as a very strong and important tool for local decision-makers.

The project includes a complete video taping of the entire shoreline. This gives planners the ability to see the actual land and surrounding properties in any permitting decision.

The data also includes the current totals for incursions and human activity impacting the shoreline.

Docks are the most common modification, with a total of 2,718 identified around the lake.

Retaining walls were the second most predominant modification with a total of 1,799 observed.

Some extended beyond the high water level of the lake, in contravention of Best Practices.

Groynes—rocks or structures built on the lake floor—are also common. Roadway fill and sand importation to create beaches, combined with other modifications, have impacted 47 per cent of the shoreline.

Carolina Restrepo-Tamayo, with Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Planning, says setting guidelines are the next step in the process.

To maintain the remaining shoreline, Restrepo-Tamayo says residents and policy makers will have to embrace two concepts: The preservation of remaining shoreline and some degree of remediation to counteract the existing environmental damage.

“There is a lot of pressure from development affecting the shoreline,” says Restrepo-Tamayo.

“We need to remember that a healthy shoreline is an analogy for a healthy lake. This lake is our main source of drinking water.”

Those guidelines could be embraced with a lake planning process, says Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of Okanagan Basin Water Board.

“We really need to have some kind of a whole lake planning process where the communities get together and think about what their vision of the lake is for the future,” says Warwick Sears.

She notes that the Okanagan Basin Water Board has applied jointly with the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program for a grant to look at where development and planned development on Okanagan Lake is relative to the sensitive areas of the lake.

“We can use that as a basis for the communities to come together and say, ‘This is what we’re planning to do. What steps should we take?’”

Warwick Sears says the Thompson region has already taken this initiative with Shuswap Lake.

The Shuswap Lake Integrated Planning Process (SLIPP) was spawned in 2007. It is a collaborative, multi-agency planning process for Shuswap and Mara Lakes.

It was launched in response to the intense pressure the surrounding area experiences as a result of increased development, wastewater discharge and conflicting demands on recreational resources.

The plan has been successful in developing a strategic plan to protect Shuswap Lake.

So, following in SLIPP's footsteps may be a positive next step for Okanagan Lake.

But for now, the FIM itself is already being of assistance.

Margaret Bakelaar, environmental land use planner with the Regional District of the Central Okanagan, says that she uses the FIM on a daily basis: Primarily on review for development permits.

The information is needed to evaluate applications.

Bakelaar says in the past, regional districts and municipalities relied on consultants' reports from qualified professionals.

She hopes that the FIM will help enlighten people about the problem.

"I hope it changes the level of awareness on how actions impact the lake," says Bakelaar.

"Before it was unknown the cumulative impacts on the lake. People were not aware of what their actions were doing."

Bakelaar says that the next step is to develop policies around this pertinent information.

"With this information, we are forced to look at the broader picture, not just the little piece of the lake we are responsible for. The cumulative effect of development on the lake is important."

This awareness is an essential step towards progress, according to City of Kelowna land use planner Greg Sauer.

Sauer was part of the team that compiled the FIM. One of his tasks was going up and down the foreshore on a boat, getting inventory of actual structures. He also assisted in reviewing the final document.

"For us, it's important that there's a broad recognition that there's a problem," says Sauer.

“These changes are incremental in nature but the cumulative effects are really significant to the quality of Okanagan Lake and how that impacts people.”

Sauer also says it is up to lakefront property owners to stop damage of the foreshore.

“It is incumbent on them to be good stewards. A lot of what we’ve seen is modifications by individuals and alterations from a natural to human type of foreshore.”

Kelowna Mayor Sharon Shepherd says the city is on board to work with other municipalities to develop actual shoreline guidelines for the lake.

“It’s fine to have independent municipalities do that, but it doesn’t impact the whole system unless we all work together,” says Shepherd.

Following SLIPP’s lead is part of the plan for Shepherd.

“Our staff that have been involved in this project feel that is what we have to have in our toolkit in order to try to prevent the decreasing of the habitat that is surrounding the lake.”

The issue of a degrading foreshore is being taken seriously on both sides of the water.

District of West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater sits on both the Okanagan Basin Water Board and the Central Okanagan Regional District board of directors.

Findlater says the District of West Kelowna council is doing what it can to protect the foreshore for both the present and future, but retroactive action is difficult without a time machine.

“It’s very difficult to turn the clock back once things have been done. I’m not aware of any instances where that has happened,” says Findlater.

“I can say that since we incorporated almost four years ago, the whole issue of building permits and bylaw enforcement has been more strict.”

Part of West Kelowna’s strategy to protect the foreshore will come via a waterfront plan, which, in its fifth draft, is expected to come before council for adoption in the near future.

“There are elements in that related to restoring some areas to original state and creating riparian type areas, where appropriate, with regard to public lands,” says Findlater.

“I think our waterfront plan is bang-on in terms of addressing those issues to the best extent we can.”

The FIM is a mirror. Many of us might not like what we see when we look in it; however, it reflects what we’ve allowed to happen.

When the glass is half full: Nearly half of the shoreline is still untouched.

With protective guidelines in place, in 20 years that glass can still be half full. Without change, the liquid in that glass won't exist and neither will our beloved shoreline.

“The FIM is a very good indicator that we either start to change and develop policies that are strong and similar in all of our communities, or we end up losing this natural asset,” says Shepherd.

Wade Paterson and Bobbi-Sue Menard are Capital News reporters.