



OKANOGAN VALLEY GAZETTE-TRIBUNE

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Thursday, September 08, 2011

Water Science Forum to discuss sustainability of Osoyoos Lake

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Northern Okanogan Valley Editor

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OSOYOOS, BC - The 2011 Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum is scheduled to take place at the Sonora Community Centre in Osoyoos, B.C. Sept. 18 to 20.

The theme of the conference is "Shared water, shared future: bridges to sustainability for Osoyoos Lake." The Okanogan Basin Water Board (OBWB), the Town of Osoyoos, the International Joint Commission (IJC) and several other partners are presenting the forum. It will cover numerous water issues affecting B.C.'s Okanogan Valley and in neighboring Okanogan County in Washington State. Milfoil control, which has recently been in the news, will be discussed, including efforts to control the invasive weed in Osoyoos Lake on both sides of the border.

Elected officials on both sides of the border of Osoyoos Lake, as well as water utility staff - who deliver water, scientists and local citizens - are signing up to attend the forum, according to organizers. The forum opens at the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre on Sunday, Sept. 18 at 5 p.m. with welcoming remarks from Stu Wells, head of the OBWB and Mayor of Osoyoos. These remarks are followed by a wine and cheese social. Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre is located at Nk'Mip Resort, about 1.5 miles east of Osoyoos off Highway 3. Driving eastbound turn left at 45th Street and follow the resort signs.

On Monday, Sept. 19 the forum moves to the Sonora Community Centre, 8505 68th Avenue. The events planned for Monday and Tuesday begin at 8 a.m.

"I am excited that the forum is taking place again this year," said Mayor Wells. "I hope to see lots of interested people attending from both sides of the border."

Currently, lake levels on Osoyoos Lake are controlled by the Washington State Department of Ecology through the operation of Zosel Dam in accordance with Operating Orders issued by the International Joint Commission (IJC) and overseen by the commission's International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control. The Board of Control is made up of U.S. and Canadian representatives. According to the OBWB, the orders expire in February 2013 25 years after the completion of the dam and the forum is being held to help gather public input in preparation for the renewal of operating orders.

"It's a critical meeting," said John Slater, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Boundary Similkameen in B.C. and former chair of the OBWB. Slater will be providing opening remarks along with Washington State Senator Bob Morton.

"Water is the one limiting resource to human settlement, industry and commercial growth. We know with population growth, agricultural growth and climate change, we're going to have to be more careful with our water use and concerned with keeping what we have clean," said Slater.

"Water is a big issue for us here in Central Washington," said Sen. Morton, noting the need for increased water storage. "We're in a state where some of our main aquifers will be out of water in 10 years."

Morton sees a potential dam on the Similkameen River, helping retain water in Washington, as another solution to the state's water concerns.

"It's obvious we need to address this issue and the sooner the better," Morton said.

The forum is being offered at a discount to residents of Oroville, Osoyoos and Oliver, with some portions being free. On-site registration will also be available at the forum. For details please visit www.obwb.ca/olwsf/.