

Value water: we can't live without it

By Kelowna Capital News

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Even though there's no life without it, we still waste water by letting it run down the gutters and trash it by mud-bogging in watersheds, notes Anna Warwick Sears, executive-director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

"As a community we need to realize the value of fresh, clean, abundant water," she explains, particularly when you compare what we have to what's available in many other parts of the world.

There's a lot of controversy about the value of water, she says. "We take it for granted."

In addition to its intrinsic value, there are the costs associated with its treatment for use as drinking water, the delivery of it to our homes, and the mis-management of it, she adds.

Sears spoke on the value of water at the OBWB annual meeting in Kelowna today, where guest speaker Chris Wood also talked about recognizing the value of water. Wood is the author of *Dry Spring: the Coming Water Crisis in North America* and *Blockbusters and Trade Wars*.

Sears notes the valuation of ecosystems is closely related to the value of water since watersheds must be protected to protect water quality, and also to conserve water.

"The more people value it, the more they'll care for it," she adds.

But, she acknowledges the challenge is to educate people about the value of water. Since it's priceless, it's crazy to talk about price, but often the price on the utility bill doesn't actually pay even for the cost of treating water to ensure it's safe to drink, or for the infrastructure required to deliver it.

That is in the process of being changed, but it's a slow process, she says.

Sears believes we also need to look further into the future, and the infrastructure needed to continue to provide adequate safe water.

"There'll be more and more people in the watersheds; in our reservoir lakes and recreating around the lakes and streams that contain our drinking water," she says.

The OBWB is working to provide the knowledge resources for civic government bodies to help them manage watersheds and water to maintain water quality and quantity in the future.

As well, the board is working on a communication strategy for the public on this 'precious resource.'

"I believe we're making headway, but it's slow," she comments.

In a wet year such as this was, with heavy snowpacks, enormous runoff and then a month of rain, it's difficult to convince the public of the importance of conserving water, yet those are the very conditions that are the cause of water quality issues, she noted.

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