

Province okays water licences despite objections

By Kelowna Capital News

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Over the objections of Lake Country council, the head of water allocation for this region for the province has granted water licences on the district's main reservoirs to a number of owners of recreational leases on lots on Crown land.

Lake Country Mayor James Baker said the reservoir's water is already fully licensed, so to add new licensees goes against the Water Act. The district intends to appeal the decision.

In a letter dated Aug. 21 to the district, Conrad Pryce, assistant regional water manager, says there is water available to meet the licensed demand and the quantity of water involved is "insignificant relative to the total reservoir volume."

Instead of licences for water for the whole year, he approved restricted licences from May 1 to Oct. 31; only for when the reservoir is more than 30 per cent full; only for the term of the Crown lease involved; and only if a flow metering device is installed and monitored, with use reports submitted annually.

However, Baker says the district hired Stu Mould of Mould Engineering last year to conduct a review of the applications to take water from Beaver (Swalwell), Crooked and Oyama Lakes.

He reported there is only water in excess of existing licences available in unusual years of high inflow when the dam is spilling, and only for a short period of time.

"No surplus water exists in the system during summer and winter periods, otherwise DLC would not have constructed the dams and storage reservoir," he wrote.

He recommended denial of the applications from the lessees.

He also questioned whether a water licence can be issued to a lessee since the Water Act says only an owner of land can hold a water licence.

When Baker brought up the issue at Friday's Okanagan Basin Water Board meeting, Toby Pike, manager of the South East Kelowna Irrigation District, reported the same thing happened on Minnow Lake, one of that district's reservoirs.

"There wouldn't have been a recreational lot there if we hadn't created the reservoir," he noted.

"Our ratepayers paid to build the reservoir, yet these lessees are getting a free ride," he added.

Board members agreed to have staff report on the matter for the next monthly meeting of the board.

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