

## BC NEWS

### Water fears in focus

by [Jon Manchester](#) | Story: 148088 - Sep 21, 2015 / 10:32 am



*Photo: Contributed*

With a drought still gripping parts of B.C. and Washington, and concerns over the possibility of a costly mussel invasion, agencies on both sides of the border are coming together to talk.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board, Town of Osoyoos and the International Joint Commission are hosting the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum, Oct. 7-9 at the Sonora Centre.

“The drought, invasive species, making sure there is enough water for fish, are key issues we need to co-ordinate on with Washington state,” says water board executive director Anna Warwick Sears. “These three issues alone represent millions of dollars for our economies.”

While the meeting is in Osoyoos, it relates to the entire Okanagan watershed, from Armstrong to the Columbia River, since the waters are all connected.

“We rarely have a chance to talk with our counterparts in the U.S., and this is an opportunity to meet with senior decision makers, and also hear from First Nations and grassroots – residents, farmers and business people – from both sides of the border,” says Sears.

“It’s about building relationships and having a shared understanding of problems so when a crisis hits you can work through them effectively. With climate change and population growth, the management of water is going to be critical.”

Osoyoos Mayor Sue McKortoff notes the lake that defines her community straddles the Canada-U.S. border. “We must look after our lake. It is the lifeblood of our community and we have to be vigilant in protecting it.”

The forum, which is open to the public, will discuss topics including drought, climate change, effects of forest fires on water, invasive mussels, milfoil and toxic blue-green algae blooms, which have been an issue in Osoyoos Lake in the past.

“The drought this year has had everyone sit up and take notice about not using water indiscriminately,” says McKortoff. “We all have to start looking at water differently.”

The board is also sponsoring a one-day “Columbia River Treaty: Past, Present and Future” workshop Oct. 7 at the Sonora Centre. With the treaty up for renegotiation, and the Okanagan being a sub-basin of the Columbia, the workshop will include a review of the treaty’s history and purpose and discussion of future implications.