

Osoyoos hosts major water forums next week

By
staff1



Brian Faltinson measures the pH or acidity of a sample of water collected from Osoyoos Lake in a file photo from last year. The local citizens' group is just one of many stakeholders seeking to protect and monitor Osoyoos Lake. Next week's forums will also hear from representatives of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, federal and provincial government officials, the International Joint Commission as well as from a number of counterparts from Washington State. The Columbia River Treaty workshop runs Wednesday at the Sonora Community Centre and the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum starts with a reception on Wednesday and continues the next two days.. (Richard McGuire file photo)

Water is crucial to the life and lifestyle of the Okanagan and it will be front and centre of a three-day forum in Osoyoos next week, one of two water-related events sure to attract plenty of local interest.

The Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum starts on Wednesday, Oct. 7 and runs to Friday, Oct. 9 at the Sonora Community Centre.

The forum will bring together scientists and experts to talk about a number of water issues affecting the South Okanagan and Osoyoos Lake in particular.

Although the discussions will be of interest to experts, it will be aimed also at the general public.

"We want to have the latest in scientific and policy information, but presented in such a way that high school kids and regular Osoyoos or Oroville residents can understand it," said Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), one of the sponsors of the event.

"It's not in any way dumbing it down," she quickly adds. "It's putting it in plain language."

The other sponsors are the Town of Osoyoos and the International Joint Commission (IJC), the Canada-U.S. body that sets the rules governing trans-boundary waterways.

A separate workshop called Columbia River Treaty: Past, Present and Future, is also being held at the Sonora Community Centre on Oct. 7.

Sears said this event has separate funding and registration and a separate organizing committee.

Nonetheless, she hopes the two events on related topics result in better attendance for both and results in savings from the sharing of resources.

The Columbia River Treaty workshop is being presented by the B.C. Branch of the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA) and Adaptation to Climate Change Team (ACT).

Both events offer discounted admission for local residents from Osoyoos, Oliver or Oroville.

The Osoyoos Lake Water Sciences Forum is free for students, who must pre-register.

Local residents can attend the entire event for \$25 or \$15 for a single day. Regular admission is \$180 for the entire event.

The Columbia River Treaty workshop is priced at \$100 for the day, but residents of Osoyoos, Oliver and Oroville will pay half price at \$50. Student admission is \$35.

Sears said the water forum will be held in the large auditorium room at the Sonora Centre. It will include some solo presenters, but will also have a number of panel discussions.

"We're going to be looking at specific issues like drought, water rights and management and comparing the U.S. and B.C. approach to dealing with those," she said, adding the goal was to have an equal number of Washington and B.C. presenters, so that each side could learn from the other's approach.

"We have all the hot-button issues facing our shared waters pulled together into one event," she said. "Drought, climate change, effects of forest fires on water, blue-green algae, invasive mussels and milfoil, water for fish and more."

This is the third time the Osoyoos Lake Water Sciences Forum has been held. Previous ones were held here in 2007 and 2011.

But Sears said the first one was an initial effort and the second was focused on the renegotiation of the operating orders for Osoyoos Lake.

The Water Sciences Forum kicks off Oct. 7 with a welcome and reception at the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre starting at 4:30 p.m.

It will include an overview presentation on First Nations aspirations as well as welcoming remarks from provincial, state, federal and IJC officials following an initial welcome by Osoyoos Mayor Sue McKortoff and Osoyoos Indian Band Chief Clarence Louie.

A wine and cheese social event follows.

Among the topics being discussed on the Thursday under the theme "Sharing Water Science" are climate change, water supply and rights, fisheries recovery and water quality.

Topics to be discussed Friday, under the theme "Ensuring Sustainability", include local actions and land use planning, the Okanagan Community Salmon Initiative, drought planning, milfoil control and defence against invasive mussels

and other aquatic invasive species.

At Wednesday's Columbia River Treaty workshop, discussions will review the treaty's history, purpose and future implications.

Although the Okanagan isn't directly covered under the existing treaty, it is a sub-basin of the Columbia and especially on issues such as fish migration and water flows, it is impacted.

Presenters include Canada's chief negotiator Kathy Eichenberger; Jay Johnson, the legal counsel for the Okanagan Nation Alliance; Barbara Cosens, law professor at the University of Idaho on the U.S. perspective; and Robert Sandford, water expert with the United Nations University in Hamilton, Ont.

Previous water science forums have drawn about 120 people, Sears said, adding that organizers hope for about the same number this time.

A steering committee has been pulling the event together and includes former Osoyoos mayor Stu Wells as chair of the forum, McKortoff as finance committee chair and Sears as program committee chair.

Representatives of Washington Department of Ecology, Environment Canada, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, U.S. Geological Survey and the IJC are also included.

Local residents can register for the Water Science Forum at the Sonora Community Centre or by phone at 250-495-6562.

Non-residents and those wishing to attend the Columbia River Treaty workshop can register for both events on their websites.

For information on the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum visit: www.obwb.ca/olwsf.

For information on the Columbia River Treaty workshop, visit: www.crtworkshop.ca.

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