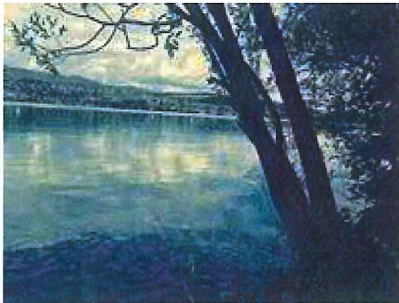


Study To Look At Water Needs

Posted on February 12, 2016 by Pete McIntyre



The Okanagan Basin Water Board has secured a federal gas tax grant for a study to get a better handle on the water needs in the region.

Board Chair Doug Findlater says the two year study will look at the water needs of fish and aquatic ecosystems, using flow monitoring equipment in streams identified as important for fish habitat.

He says it's an essential process needed to sustainably manage water in the valley.

"Water is precious in the Okanagan, where we have one of the lowest rates of water available per person than anywhere in Canada, but have one of the highest rates of use in the country," says Findlater. "Through this grant, the Water Board, Okanagan Nation Alliance and FLNRO (Forests, Natural Lands Ministry) , will be conducting the largest Environmental Flow Needs study in Canada."

The board was awarded a grant for \$397,000.

OBWB's Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears says the project was identified back in 2010 when the agency completed Phase 2 of its Water Supply and Demand Study.

"Since then, concerns have continued to grow about the number of water licences on Okanagan streams, so we started working with the province on how to make the best licencing decisions. But then we both realized there's a critical information gap – we need to know the needs of fish before allocating more licences. In fact, B.C.'s new Water Sustainability Act will require environmental needs be taken into consideration," says Warwick Sears.

"Instead of waiting to see the fish gasping in the streams, this will allow us to know how much water they need," adds Sears. "It's like an advanced warning system, letting us know when and where restrictions and regulations are needed."

Pauline Terbasket, ONA's Executive Director says the project comes at a critical time with everyone facing the backdrop of climate change and the likelihood of increased drought.