

news

OKANAGAN LAKE STUDY

Federal \$397,000 grant to monitor creek water flows

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board has been given \$397,000 by the federal government to study and record water flows in creeks entering Okanagan Lake and the water needs in the region.

The money, from the federal the federal Gas Tax Fund, will help local, municipal provincial and federal officials here better understand the water needs in the Okanagan, a region known for its water challenges and Canada's largest population growth. The announcement was made Friday in Kelowna.

With the funding, the two-year second phase of the study will begin looking at the



Okanagan Basin Water Board executive director Anna Warwick Sears with a map of the major creeks that flow into Okanagan Lake which were identified in the first phase of a study looking at water needs in the region.

environmental flow needs—or the water needs of fish and aquatic ecosystems—here. The phase of the project will include

approximately 10 stream-by-stream studies, using flow monitoring equipment in streams identified as important for fish habitat throughout the valley.

The work will be a partnership between the OBWB and Okanagan Nation Alliance's fisheries department and the B.C. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.

"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," said Doug Findlater, chairman of the OBWB.

"Through this grant, the water board, ONA and FLNRO, will be conducting the largest environmental flow needs study in Canada. This is an essential process needed to sustainably manage the waters of this valley."

Steve Thomson, B.C.'s minister of forests, lands and natural resource operations and the MLA for Kelowna-Mission said with last year's drought in mind, the findings of the study will help his ministry deal with similar environmental situations here in the future.

The federal funding announced on Friday will help the water board, which serves the three Okanagan regional districts, to plan ahead and prioritize the water needs of fish and aquatic ecosystems, helping ensure the sustainability of the Okanagan, said Kelowna-Lake Country MP Stephen Fuhr, speaking on behalf of the Amarjeet Sohi, the new federal infrastructure and communities minister.

OBWB's executive director, Anna Warwick Sears, said the need for the project was identified back in 2010 when the agency completed phase two 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," she said. "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 to be taken into consideration."

She also referenced last year's drought, saying competing needs for water, such as population growth, industry, agriculture and, of course, aquatic species are continuing to multiply so the project will help make the best water-use decisions possible.

The project will help the province with water licence decisions, but

it will also help local governments make better informed development and infrastructure planning decisions too. And, it will also help the ONA and FLNRO with their respective fishery recovery efforts.

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

Pauline Terbasket, the ONA's executive director said her organization, which has constitutional rights to the waters affected, will benefit from further collaboration.

"This comes at a critical time with us all facing the backdrop of climate change and the likelihood of increased drought," said Terbasket.

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SCIENCE WORLD ROAD SHOW

Students get excited about science

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For seven years, between 2005 and 2012, Science World in Vancouver hit the road visiting schools around the province with a traveling science show, building an interest in science in one million of the province's youngest student learners.

The program was

funded by government and donors but when the finances dried up, the program was shelved.

That's until this year when Science World is once again on the road with a plan to hit some 30,000 students outside of Vancouver, funding the program itself.

And judging by the reaction of students at Ellison Elementary on Tuesday afternoon, the

program is a major hit with kids, who were fired up by Science World's Fantastic Forces show, demonstrating gravity and friction in a fun and interactive way.

"That show went really well," said Science World On the Go team leader and program coordinator Stephan Adamus, one of two Science World employees putting on shows at Kelowna schools this week.

"It was great for us to see. We want kids to get excited about science and learning and maybe we can teach them about some of the concepts of science that are in their curriculum."

The Science World On the Road Program is visiting eight Kelowna area schools week, sometimes running two different shows.

Adamus has prepared shows that are relevant from kindergarten to Grade 3, kindergarten to Grade 7, Grade 4 to Grade 7 as well as a workshop for high school students.

On Friday, during a Pro-D day, a Science World science curriculum specialist will share techniques with local

teachers to help them incorporate inquiry-based science learning into their classrooms.

"To us it's important to show the kids that science is more than just lab work and vigorous testing and studies," said Adamus.

"It can be really interesting and fun and if you can get kids excited about it, you can generate better learning and critical thinkers."

Between September 2015 and June 2016, the On The Road team will go to 17 communities across the province.

Adamus says his goal is to reach every student in the province outside of Vancouver over the next five years.

"I remember as a kid when Science World opened up. I loved it so much but it's only in Vancouver," he said.

"To be able to think we can take a really cool piece of what we do at Science World to as many kids as we can around the province is wonderful and so important."

For more on the program check out the group's web site at scienceworld.ca/ontheroad.

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