

Kelowna

Water concerns in the valley

Nicholas Johansen - Mar 22, 2016 / 8:45 pm



Photo: Nicholas Johansen

What does the future of water look like in the Okanagan?

A hundred people packed into the Laurel Packinghouse in Kelowna Tuesday night to find an answer.

Coinciding with UN World Water Day, the discussions on the past, present and future of water in the Okanagan were presented by several experts in the field.

Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, said global climate change has, and will continue, to affect weather intensity in the Okanagan.

"We'll have more extreme conditions, we're going to have more heavy rainfall, we're going to have more intense drought years," Warwick Sears said.

She said last summer's drought, which was a function of a low snowpack and fast melting in the spring followed by dry temperatures, was predicted by climate change models.

She says this year is looking vastly different.

"We've got a huge snowpack up there," she said. "What's going to make the big difference this year is how fast is that snowpack going to melt."

If the snowpack melts rapidly, the Okanagan could be at risk of flooding.

Don Dobson, a professional engineer in flood protection, spoke about how best to manage flood risks.

"The governments decided that an appropriate level of protection was to protect people against a one-in-200-year flood event," Dobson said. "Holland has done it by flood-risk planning ... and they are using things like 1-in-2500 and a one-in-10,000 year event to provide direction for protection against flooding and that is really where we need to go."

Warwick Sears said many smaller communities in the Okanagan need to update their drought and water plans to deal with increased extreme weather in the future.