

## Okanagan Basin Water Board says cooperation and global thinking key to solving water issues



By Vernon Morning Star

Published: **September 09, 2016 01:00 PM**

Updated: **September 09, 2016 01:221 PM**

The Okanagan Basin Water Board has called for a spirit of cooperation and global thinking as communities around the Okanagan move forward with issues relating to water.

The OBWB held its Annual General Meeting on Friday morning at the Laurel Packinghouse in Kelowna, urging residents and municipalities to think beyond its borders and realize water issues are all related.

"Even though a watershed is a geographic boundary useful for managing our waters, we are increasingly finding ourselves affected by things happening outside of our watershed, including invasive species, changing weather patterns due to global warming and population growth," said Dr. Anna Warwick-Sears, executive director for the OBWB. "We can't ignore what's happening around us, and at the same time we have to be good citizens and recognize that our actions do affect surrounding watersheds in Canada, the U.S. and the world."

The OBWB heard from keynote speaker Dr. Amber Manfree a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California. She went over the issues California has struggled with during a five year drought. Manfree said the Okanagan is in a good position to get out in front of upcoming water issues that the area will be dealing with.

"I think you're in a good position because you're not over-developed, you still have room to manage and leave room for natural processes to occur," she said. "California is so huge and complex that it can be really hard to problem solve. Here it seems like there are open lines of communication and it's not too adversarial. People are already talking to each other and it's a very high level conversation."

When it comes to the Okanagan, last summer's drought put a severe test on the communities water conservation practices and just how to handle a drought. Warwick-Sears related the drought to new parents, who believed they were ready for the birth of a child, but when it actually happened, they realized they weren't ready.

"We thought we were ready (for a drought) but when it came last year we realized we weren't ready," said Warwick-Sears. "We realized there is a lot more organization and planning that needs to happen around droughts."

Warwick-Sears agreed with Manfree about the state of the problem in the Okanagan as compared to what is happening in California.

"What we are doing in the Okanagan is we're trying to get ahead of the problems," she said. "Use them as an example of what can happen if you don't plan properly. We're trying to build relationships with stakeholders and different levels of government so when a crisis does happen we are a well-oiled machine."

As part of the OBWB AGM, Peachland was named the Make Water Work Champion as the community which collects the most pledge per capita to conserve water this summer.

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