



Mill Creek spilled its banks last year, causing flooding along Adams Road in Kelowna last year. Photo credit: Capital News files

Okanagan streamflows, water demands to be studied

Okanagan Basin Water Board received funding to help study water issues

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With the Okanagan coming off a year which featured heavy floods as well as a drought later in the summer, the supply and demand of water in the region will be studied for the first time in nearly a decade.

Nearly \$400,000 will be spent to update a 2010 study that looked at the Okanagan Valley's water supply and demand with the money coming from the federal gas tax.

The study will focus on streamflows from up to 27 tributaries that enter the major lakes in the Okanagan Valley

"We're very pleased to receive this funding," said Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB's executive director. "With all the uncertainty we've seen with historic flooding, and extreme drought with low flows in streams, it's more important than ever to have the best science to estimate streamflow."

Streams that will be studied include Vernon and Whiteman Creeks in the North Okanagan, Mission and Mill Creeks in the Central Okanagan, Trout and Shuttleworth Creeks in the South Okanagan, and others.

"Local planners and water managers simply cannot rely on historic water patterns and ranges to manage supply any longer," said Warwick Sears. "We need to identify the shifts in supply—in snowpack, in rainfall, and reservoir storage—and consider these in flood and drought plans, resource development plans and infrastructure plans."

The data will be made available to local governments, Okanagan First Nations and utilities, helping them make water management and future planning decisions to meet the needs of all, including fish, agriculture, and human consumption.

It will also be provided to the province to help with water licensing decisions.

"There have been a lot of technological advances and improvements in streamflow estimating science since the last time we did these studies. It's time to update our understanding of what is happening with water in our valley," said Warwick Sears.

The streamflow study is expected to begin in spring 2018 and wrap up by the end of 2019.

The Federal Gas Tax Fund is provided twice-a-year to provinces and territories and is intended to address three objectives: productivity and economic growth, a clean environment, and strong cities and communities.

In B.C., the program is administered by the Union of BC Municipalities.

Dir. Wendy Booth, UBCM President, spoke to the importance of this funding. "Communities across B.C. are looking for funding to replace, upgrade and expand local infrastructure," she added. "The federal Gas Tax Fund is accelerating the pace of infrastructure renewal through the transfer of close to \$3 billion since 2005 for projects in our province. I appreciate the Government of Canada's long-term commitment to fund priorities identified by B.C. local governments."

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