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Feds, B.C. provide funds to help Okanagan map its floodplains

By staff1 on April 17, 2018

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Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, says extreme fluctuations in weather are going to be more common, so floodplain mapping shows communities where they shouldn't build and where mitigation plans are necessary. (Richard McGuire file photo)

The Okanagan is receiving $1.45 million in federal and provincial funding to conduct floodplain mapping.

The funds were announced last week at a joint news conference in Kelowna with the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) and local government representatives.

The money comes from the federal government's National Disaster Mitigation Program and the B.C. Community Emergency Preparedness Fund.

Floodplain mapping is important both for providing information about where communities should and should not be building, as well as where mitigation plans are necessary in already developed areas, said Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB executive director.

"The weather in the Okanagan is changing," said Sears. "Last spring, we saw historic flooding in our valley, followed by a prolonged dry spell. Climate scientists have warned that extreme fluctuations are going to be more common."

The flood mapping will use LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), a radar technology that is a form of aerial imaging, said Sears. It creates a digital 3D map of the landscape to help with flood mapping and disaster mitigation.

It is combined with geo-referenced aerial photos to accurately map the landscape.

"The LiDAR will show where water is likely to flow," said Sears. "It will include modeling of how much water can be expected and help determine vulnerable locations."

The data will be available at no cost to Okanagan communities.

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