



## Okanagan Basin water projects funded

Fiscal support for 18 water projects amounts to \$300,000

Apr. 17, 2018 10:30 a.m. / [COMMUNITY](#) / [NEWS](#)



The Okanagan Basin Water Board has approved \$300,000 in funding to 18 projects to help conserve and improve the quality of water in the valley.

The water board directors approved the Water Conservation and Quality Improvement (WCQI) grants at their April 3 meeting and recipients were notified last week. In all, there were 23 applications with a total funding request of \$435,180.

Those projects approved for funding ranged from public outreach for water quality protection to water conserving irrigation improvements in public parks.

“This program has such value,” said OBWB chair Tracy Gray, noting that the grants are made available to local governments, but also to schools, stewardship groups and others, encouraging broader engagement on valley-wide water issues.

“Solutions are not always government driven. This is a tremendous way to engage others, recognizing that we’re all part of ‘One valley. One water.’”

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Another benefit has been the ability for grant recipients to leverage OBWB funding to bring in additional funds for Okanagan water projects, Gray added. Up until the current funding cycle, this has amounted to more than \$27.2 million invested in our valley.

Four projects were funded in the North Okanagan this year, including \$14,730 to the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program to build out an Okanagan-based school curriculum on water and work with the Indigenous Syilx community to include traditional ecological knowledge.

“This project represents an important opportunity to broaden water knowledge throughout the valley, by providing a curriculum for teachers to directly educate about water issues and the solutions we are collectively pursuing,” added James Littley, OBWB’s operations and grants manager.

In the Central Okanagan, 10 projects were funded, including \$25,000 to the Mission Creek Restoration Initiative to ensure flood protection and wildlife habitat restoration objectives are being met.

This multi-year project demonstrates the impact of watercourse restoration and the positive effects it can have on water quality, flood mitigation, sediment control and habitat enhancement. This project, like similar projects in the valley, help restore ecosystems and create benefits at a fraction of the cost of providing traditional infrastructure.

“The Mission Creek Restoration Initiative has been a shining example of best practices, collaboration and project management,” Littley added.

“Mission Creek accounts for 25 per cent of the water that flows into Okanagan Lake. A healthy, functioning creek is especially critical as we experience droughts and floods. Projects like this can help mitigate the effects of these extreme events.”

Another four projects were supported in the South Okanagan. One of these was \$29,000 to the En’owkin Centre for a floodplain re-engagement project. The project involves reconnecting the Penticton portion of the Okanagan River Channel to 4.83 hectares of the river’s adjacent historic floodplain, allowing for natural backwatering as water levels in the main river channel rise and fall.

This will provide numerous benefits, including the creation of a seasonal off-channel rearing habitat for Indigenous fish and refuge for juvenile salmon, specifically for sk’l’wist’ntytyix (i.e. chinook salmon). It will also support indigenous biodiversity and recovery of species at-risk, and improve connectivity between rare and endangered floodplain habitats with upland plant habitats.

In addition, the project will provide an opportunity to share local Indigenous cultural and ecological education, awareness and interaction.

“I’m really excited about this project.” Littley added. “Reconnecting the river to the floodplain here means so much for the water in terms of conservation and quality improvement, but it is also complementary to the work that the Okanagan Nation and its member bands have been doing to restore salmon and salmon habitat throughout the valley.

“There are so many positive economic, social and environmental benefits from projects like this, especially when you look at the cumulative impact of similar efforts up and down the Okanagan system.”

Since the Water Board began awarding WCQI grants in 2006, it has awarded more than \$4.1 million to 250 projects throughout the Okanagan.

The amount available in each region is based on the contribution provided by each Okanagan regional district. Projects must meet a number of criteria, including the ability to demonstrate water savings or improvements to water quality, collaboration and valley-wide benefit.

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