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Fires, flooding, droughts: New research studies Okanagan collectively

Carli Berry



UBCO Okanagan's Rehan Sadiq, left, discusses drinking water assessment tools and benchmarking strategies with students Gyan K C Shrestha and Sarin Raj Pokhrel.
Image Credit: UBCO

June 07, 2020 - 3:30 PM

The Okanagan natural assets are a draw for its residents but how they are being protected is something that's getting a closer view.

Rehan Sadiq, a UBCO civil engineering professor who works in the water sector of municipalities, said there are peculiar issues here that are unique to the Okanagan Valley.

"We have challenges around drought, fire, flooding. It's very interesting to study," he said.

For example, flooding can impact overall water services, and not only drinking water is the issue, but stormwater management and the water in Okanagan Lake, he said.

The one-water project will investigate state-of-the-art practices in urban water management. At the same time, researchers will identify and develop performance indicators, performance assessment and benchmarking framework, and create a portal for information analysis, sharing and learning throughout the Okanagan, according to UBCO.

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"Benchmarking is very important because we need to know where we stand and how to help (cities) improve," he said.

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The project is supported by the City of Kelowna, City of West Kelowna, City of Vernon, District of Peachland, District of Lake Country, Town of Osoyoos, Regional District of North Okanagan and Okanagan Basin Water Board. It is expected that more community partners from the Valley will also join this project, according to UBC.

"We have to see environmental aspects and (the) customers' point of view," he said.

Consumption levels will also be analyzed, he said. Per capita water consumption is higher per person than other parts of Canada because of agricultural use in the Okanagan, he said.

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Habits seem to be changing in the Okanagan with water use, he said, adding while sprinkler and other and other water-wasting incidents are happening, this project aims to determine the scale of how much water is being consumed and comparing performance between Okanagan municipalities.

The project kicked-off in March and will continue for the next four years.