



Kelowna

Water awareness increasing Okanagan residents are becoming more aware of water conservation and protection concerns

Miriam Halpenny - Dec 4, 2020 / 7:00 pm



Photo: Contributed

A new survey conducted by the Okanagan Basin Water Board has found Okanagan residents are concerned for water conservation and protection.

"Despite being known for our lakes, the Okanagan has among the lowest amounts of water available in Canada and yet we have one of the highest rates of water use," says OBWB chair Sue McKortoff.

"Anything we can do to make people aware of this precious resource and protect it is important."

Population growth, climate change and water availability and quality are all challenges that Okanagan water protection faces.

"The survey is an important tool in helping us gauge awareness and understanding of our water issues, which in turn can help guide our public outreach, as well as other water management efforts," says communications director for the Water Board Corinne Jackson.

A telephone survey conducted by the board included 500 residents throughout the valley, similar to a survey conducted in 2014.

Major highlights of this year's survey include:

Concerns about the impact of forest fires, invasive mussels and climate change is growing.

Fires and mussels were the top two concerns discovered in the 2014 survey. This remained the same, however climate change has risen to the third top concern, reaching an average rate of 7.1 out of 10, compared to 5.9 in 2014.

Eighty-five per cent of respondents say they are practicing water conservation. The most popular method of conservation is watering a yard less (52 per cent). Other methods include washing clothes with larger loads, using the dishwasher less and creating low-water landscapes at home.

Fifty-two per cent of respondents say they work to protect water quality. Top ways include not putting anything down the storm drain (63 per cent), not flushing medications, not putting fats and grease down the drain and not using chemical fertilizers.

For those who do not protect water quality, 68 per cent were unsure why.

"As water utilities try to address ongoing water quality issues, the importance of messaging ways to keep the water clean is becoming a growing issue. And not just in the valley bottom, but also in the backcountry - the source of water for many residents," says Jackson.

Eighty-five per cent of respondents are familiar with invasive zebra and quagga mussels and 55 per cent have heard of the OBWB OkWaterWise's 'Don't Move a Mussel' message.

Seventy-three per cent of those who are familiar with the message own watercraft. When respondents were asked about the purpose of the message, 64 per cent said it is to remind watercraft owners to clean their boats before going into the lake. This is an increase from 36 per cent in 2014.

"With continued concern about the introduction of invasive mussels into our waters, it is great to see the level of awareness for this issue and the understanding that 'Clean, Drain, Dry' is an important solution to keeping it out," says Jackson.

"Thank you to all who participated," added McKortoff. "These survey results show us what we need to do better and will help guide the work of the board, staff, and residents of our valley, to be even better water stewards."