



Toby Pike: Okanagan water management advocate dies at 65

Long-time SEKID manager passed away at Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria

[BARRY GERDING](#) / [Jul. 24, 2021](#) 10:00 a.m. / [COMMUNITY](#)



A leading voice in Central Okanagan water management issues over the last three decades died Friday, July 16, at Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria.

Toby Pike passed away at the age of 65 after waging a battle against cancer.

Pike was the general manager of the South East Kelowna Irrigation District (SEKID) beginning in 1994 until it was taken over by the City of Kelowna in 2018, and was a long-time chair and board member of the Water Supply Association of B.C. and director on the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

In the political arena, Pike was also a candidate for Kelowna city council in 2009.

Bruce Wilson, a member of the local water management community as manager of Rutland Water Works for 20 years, said Pike was always a strong advocate for water management.

“Anything he took on he did with 110 per cent effort. He was an amazing guy,” Wilson said.

Wilson cited several accomplishments Pike was a leading force behind during his career working for SEKID.

“He actually was a fish catcher on the coast before he moved to the Okanagan,” Wilson recalled.

“But he was responsible for turning around a bad irrigation district program....and he had to deal with a lot of pressures that come with that area building up in population when the golf course (Gallagher’s Canyon) came in and turning a badly conceived water meter system for agricultural water users and turning it into a successful one.”

The federal government recognized SEKID as the first jurisdiction in Canada to implement a successful agricultural water meter program under Pike’s direction.

Wilson said Pike also stepped up to the forefront of a difficult health issue in the aftermath of the *Cryptosporidium* outbreak in Kelowna in the summer of 1996 when 10,000 to 15,000 people got sick.

The health authority was pushing for more intensive water testing efforts in the aftermath of that outbreak, but Wilson said Pike did his homework and learned testing would be expensive and had effectiveness limitations, saying the government was better off to fund better water treatment systems.

He was also a strong advocate against the government leasing out recreational property lots on the shores of local reservoirs, potentially polluting a valuable source of domestic water supply.

“The government of the day had the idea of subdividing lots around these reservoirs, which they referred to as lakes, around B.C. That passed everywhere around the province except for the Okanagan.

Toby helped lead the push against that initiative because of the pressure it would place on our reservoirs which we all depend on for drinking water supply.”

Wilson said Pike’s time with SEKID came to a disappointing end when the city took over the irrigation district in 2016.

SEKID had a plan to upgrade drinking water standards to more stringent Interior Health public standards but had difficulty securing government funding to pay for the infrastructure upgrade at a time when the province was beginning to advocate for independent irrigation districts be phased out within municipalities, instead of falling under civic government jurisdiction.

“He was very upset about how all that happened as a lot of people were,” Wilson noted.

Bob Hrasko, the administrator for the Black Mountain Irrigation District, said Pike’s legacy to water management in the Central Okanagan won’t be forgotten.

“He contributed all the way through to our industry. There were troubling times with Interior Health and he didn’t always see eye to eye with others on things, but he was always up for a good discussion on a policy issue,” Hrasko said.

“He was always practical in making his argument and he always had good, well thought out points to make but it was never personal. He always discussed policy on the merits of an actual topic. I really respected him for that.”

A celebration of life is planned for Pike at a late date.