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## Valley water use challenges loom By J.P, SQUIRE Okanagan Newspaper Group Jan 30, 2023 Updated 20 hrs ago



costs. With its water challenges, the Okanagan needs to minimize water use and maximize the economic benefits.

water challenges.

The drier, southern part of the region sees an average of 250 mm of precipitation per year, while the

northern part and higher elevations see an average of 400 mm per year. Kelowna Airport, for example,

receives 298 mm of which 102 mm (34 per cent) falls as snow.

Water, water, everywhere. That may be the case elsewhere but the Okanagan Valley has always had its

Compare that to Henderson Lake on Vancouver Island which receives annual rainfall throughout the year at 7,296 mm, over 23 feet, more than any other place in North America.

Irrigation districts in the Okanagan don't have that luxury so they collect the snowmelt from the mountains surrounding the valley, store in upper lakes or dams, then dole it out throughout the year.

"We've done a number of studies that talk about irrigation water in the Okanagan," said Nelson Jatel, water stewardship director for the Okanagan Basin Water Board, in an interview this week.

south, depending on the crop and depending on whether or not you are in the Osoyoos region or in Armstrong. But irrigation water does take up a significant amount of water throughout the region."

"Of the water we use, about 70 per cent goes to farmland irrigation. Consumption also varies north to

noted, but researchers or practitioners have not comprehensively evaluated agricultural water use's benefits and costs.

"This work is critically needed to inform policy aimed at protecting access to water for the farming

sector, prioritize infrastructure and ecological restoration investments, and address anxieties around the

Agriculture has played an undeniable role in shaping the Okanagan culture, landscape and economy, he

future water supply."

So the OBWB is working with UBC Okanagan, the B.C. Fruit Growers' Association and others to look at the value of irrigated agriculture for food, climate moderation, fire breaks and more, he said.

"The project will consider developing policies to protect water for farming, and look at how water allocations and investments in irrigation can support the Okanagan economy."

irrigation water in the Okanagan Valley, he explained, as growing seasons become longer and warmer,

Climate change drives the demand for

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and agriculturally suitable regions shift northward and into higher elevations.



This project will address the following three questions:

• What is the economic value of irrigated agriculture to the Okanagan (direct: e.g., increased yield, higher

value crops; indirect: e.g., food processing, agri-tourism; induced: e.g., business investment; external:

aesthetics, climate moderation, culture, fire breaks?

strategies by the communities and regional districts in the valley.

- What is the opportunity/cost of using water for irrigation in the Okanagan (e.g., infrastructure construction and maintenance, alternative water uses no longer available, riparian ecosystem damage)?
  How can future water allocations and irrigation infrastructure investments maximize the contribution
- potential for expanding irrigated areas, and how are these impacts distributed among the different communities and sectors of the valley?

irrigated agriculture makes to the Okanagan economy, given forecasts for climate change-induced

development scenarios," he said.

Some studies have already been completed: the Okanagan Supply and Demand study; crop suitability and climate change work done by Agriculture Canada; and official community plans and regional growth

"The final output will be a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) for selecting Okanagan irrigated agriculture

The results of examining those will help complete an economic impact analysis comparable to those recently done for the Kelowna airport and the wine industry.

Then researchers will look at the broader context of the social, cultural and environmental values that

water contributes to in the Okanagan.

updates and seek feedback, said Jatel.

An advisory committee of research partners and subject-matter experts will provide quarterly project

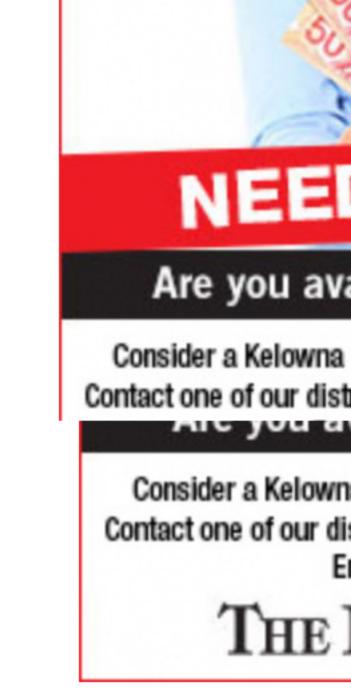
One of the objectives is a workshop at the monthly meeting of the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council to refine research questions and identify sources of information. The team will also produce reports on the results of the cost-benefit analysis and economic impact, and a summary of the complete project, highlighting areas of particular interest to project partners.

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The tentative timeline is to start the project in April; complete the initial draft of the economic-impact

analysis for review in March 2024; complete the cost-benefit analysis for review in December 2024; and

complete the summary, sharing it with funding agencies, in March 2025.



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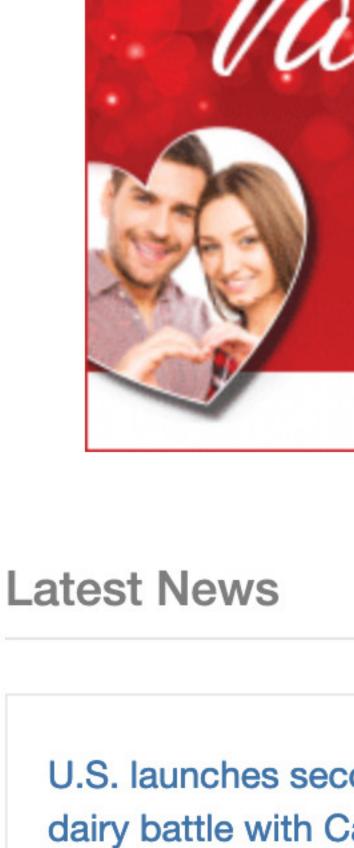
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