

OKANAGAN WATER STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

A Technical Advisory Body to the Okanagan Basin Water Board

MINUTES OF THE JOINT COUNCIL/BOARD MEETING HELD May 4th, 2021, VIRTUALLY THROUGH THE ZOOM PLATFORM

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Present

Chair, OCCP	Scott Boswell
Vice-Chair, ECCC	Jeremy Fyke
BC Wildlife Federation – Region 8	Lorne Davies
Canadian Water Resources Association	Brian Guy
Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada	Kirsten Hannam
UBC Okanagan	Bernard Bauer
Emeritus, Independent	Denise Neilsen
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries	Andrew Petersen
Independent	Renee Clark
Regional District of Central Okanagan	Brittany Lange
Regional District of North Okanagan	Tricia Brett
BC Agriculture Council	Hans Buchler
BC Groundwater Association	Marta Green
Interior Health Authority	Rob Birtles
Okanagan College	Rob St. Onge
Ministry of Agriculture	Stephanie Tam
BC Water Supply Association	Bob Hrasko
FLNRORD	Shaun Reimer
Okanagan Shuswap Natural Resource District	Tony Zanotto

STAFF:

OBWB, Office and Grants Manager	James Littley
OBWB, Executive Director	Anna Warwick Sears
OBWB, Water Stewardship Director	Nelson Jatel
OBWB, Communications Director	Corinne Jackson
OBWB, Policy and Planning Specialist	Kellie Garcia
OBWB, Special Projects Coordinator	Carolina Restrepo
OBWB, Technical Writer and Researcher	Farah Kanani

BOARD MEMBERS:

Present

OBWB, Chair, Town of Osoyoos, Mayor	Sue McKortoff
OBWB, Vice-Chair, District of Peachland, Major	Cindy Fortin
Director, City of Vernon, Mayor	Victor Cumming
Director, District of Lake Country, Mayor	James Baker
Director, Water Supply Association of BC, Chair	Bob Hrasko
Director, RDNO, Electoral Area 'B'	Bob Fleming
Director, RDNO, Electoral Area 'D'	Rick Fairbairn
Alt Director, District of Summerland, Councilor	Doug Holmes
Director, Okanagan Nation Alliance	Christopher Derickson
Director, RDOS, Electoral Area 'C'	Rick Knodel

GUESTS:

Gorman Bros. Lumber Ltd.	Randy Hardy
Recreation Sites and Trails BC	Ian McLellan
Local Media	Barry Gerding
Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy	Jennifer Vignano
Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy	Ted Zimmerman
ONA	Tessa Terbasket
City of Penticton	Michael Firlotte

1. WELCOME FROM THE CHAIRS

Sue McKortoff (OBWB Chair) welcomed Scott Boswell (OWSC Chair) and all council members present.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

Scott provided an introduction to cover his personal career background, a brief history of the WSC and the planned committees for the next term. This was followed by introductions from each member of the OBWB and the OWSC including their water priorities and interests.

3. KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: BC Watershed Security Strategy (Ted Zimmerman and Jennifer Viganò, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy)

- Brief introduction provided regarding the watershed security strategy.
- Expect to come back to the government with alignment of the strategy with broader priorities: coastal marine, salmon, drinking water and economic stability.
- Example: stream scarcity and groundwater – Koksilah River, Southern Vancouver Island.
- Engagement and Collaboration: public, stakeholders; local, federal government; First Nations.
- Discussed timeline for planning, engagement, report, approvals, introducing to legislation and launching strategy and fund

4. DISCUSSION

Renee: I have been working with the WSC on the source water protection plan over the past two terms and much of what we came up with in our position paper is similar to what you're looking at. Making sure that the legislation for the Syilx people is being followed and coordination with First Nations. We really would like to see at some point how a lead agency could help with the governance of this. We have seen this often where there have been so many directions from the Drinking Water Protection Act and not just the Water Sustainability Act. I really hope you engage with the Ministry of Health. There are so many responses and assessment plans that are part of our permit to operate as water utilities and I think there is so much information that would be helpful in leading this legislation on how we can move forward with this watershed security and especially funding. I think that's where we fall down frequently –

funding of dollars and resources. People that informed on how to go through it.

Ted: Thanks Renee. I can ensure you that we are engaging regularly with Ministry of Health on the drinking water work. We are in the midst of developing some internal structure so that we have convergence across those various legislative toolsets I suppose and ultimately to drive the strategy's outcomes on protecting drinking water. We just had a meeting last Thursday and we opened up the Hall Car file as an example where we shared what led to Hall Car, how did we respond to it, what were the challenges in terms of organizational alignment and who has the accountability for ultimately managing at a landscape level those drinking water requirements. There is more work to do. We have the drinking water protection piece that we are elevating right to Cabinet to put that message in front of our political masters to say we can't do a watershed security strategy without elevating water protection.

Bernie: Thanks for the presentation. I really applaud the effort to get this thing rolling and I know it is still early days. I found it hard to sink my teeth into anything of course its partly the nature of this presentation at the high level but you have all the key words but to make these things work, you have to really get into the weeds. I'm really interested to see how this plays out in detail because there are some hard decisions that will have to be made.

What I would encourage you to do is to focus on what the role of the provincial government is relative to other jurisdictions. In part you have got a legislative regulatory requirement through the Water Sustainability Act but for example, you didn't really speak to the fund part at all and the reality is much of what is going to drive this is the availability of resources. I would just like to make a plug for thinking about the role of senior levels of governments (federal and provincial) in monitoring and providing datasets e.g. hydrometric stations in the past and they keep getting closed down and we have been working on engagement and this is the role of academics. If we have good robust data, people will jump on it eventually and use those data for good purposes and you can't always anticipate that.

For example the longitudinal data that you showed over 5 decades, that kind of analysis we ought to do on every major system. I don't think we can really even do it on many of the creeks in the Okanagan to understand what's going on, in

particular higher elevation snow pillow data. There is a role for government in terms of providing the data infrastructure that others can use. Thinking about the role of senior government relative to other jurisdictions should be part of this strategy.

Ted: yes, thanks for that, I couldn't agree more. My colleague David Tesch, who is the executive director of the knowledge management branch would probably have echoed those exact words and he has been very vocal in terms of where we want to go on the security strategy point of view. We get that the point of a strategy is nebulous. It is likely going to be a conversation around how do we better embed the interests and perspectives of local nations and stakeholders in watershed management, how do we set objectives for water, how do we monitor whether those objectives are being achieved, how do we drive certain management actions to try and get those objectives.

So it's classic adaptive management loop and good data systems and well-designed questions are essential to be able to achieve the objectives and make sure the management actions/strategies you take are able to address those objectives. The province can't do it all. I hear you and agree that governments should align and take ownership and it has and it does on good water management but what we are recognizing there can't just be just a central authority for water in BC, it has to be shared accountability.

We want to see an increased opportunity for local governments, local nations, and communities to influence and shape that water management timeline going forward and be able to put in place certain actions. The question is, does the fund drive the strategy or does the strategy drive the fund. We are having live conversations around that right now because we don't want to start putting out funding if that funding is not going to be used in the right place. On the other hand, we have done some really great work with dollars to date and there is probably opportunity to improve and extend that work.

Cindy: Thank you for the presentation. It is comforting to see more being done towards watershed security. The big issue here in Peachland, we just restarted our Peachland Healthy Watersheds Committee because we have some very serious concerns and now we are hearing more and more communities have them as well. That auditor general report you are referring to I think is 2017, but it was really a scathing report about lack of oversight and reporting on

what was going on in watersheds. There is also another report, we call them the 'whoops' reports as they weren't a good idea after all and with climate change, things were seeing a faster melt, reforestation isn't good because the little trees aren't getting cover and I am really glad to see this is being taken more seriously lately. I'm a little hesitant to get too excited about it as I see it is going to be a couple of years before we will even get the report done but I really think this is hugely important.

I am picking on forestry because forestry is our major concern but we also have our mining exploration and recreation and cattle grazing that affect our watershed. Our watershed is now 30% harvested and it is something that is really concerning us. We did write a letter to the former Minister Donaldson when he was in and asked for cessation of forestry. I understand there is economic considerations there but I was looking it up recently and I think the numbers are too high but 90% of our harvested timber is exported. So what I am hoping for in addition to funding is that there will be an opportunity to provide more jobs and training and sustainable, green, industry so that we are not as dependent on things like forestry and mining. We still have to have it but to a lesser degree I hope. You look at the sky view of our watershed right now, even the buffer zones are good enough around our lakes. You pull back, and it is all clear cut and it is very concerning.

Ted: thank you mayor for that point of view. It really is a very live conversation for us with our colleagues over at the FLNR, there is forest development, planning frameworks that are under way as well. We are going to find opportunities to synergize the funding discussions because what we can't do is come in and impose a water centric view of the world and say all the other values don't matter. We're being very sensitive to ensure we are contemplating the socio-economic interests the economic development interests of your communities when we develop the work.

Cindy: I forgot to mention that stakeholders/ local government should have more say in their watershed. Right now we kind of get a courtesy but we are not taken as serious as we would like to be. We were told that we had to build a water treatment plant, that was millions of dollars. Let us have more say about what goes on in our watershed as well as indigenous groups around us.

James B: Thanks for the presentation. Major Fortin raised most of my points but with the multi-use watershed that is of concern now. One thing

we did ask for is we should know is limiting recreation on the reservoirs apart from the fishing or hunting in the watersheds. It was the summer cabins that were of concern particularly in our watersheds especially when the government was offering the cabin leases to have them converted to fee simple and then it would be private property on our reservoirs and that was a great concern to us and it came off the table because of some hard lobbying but it was seen as a source of revenue when you look at the price of lakeshore property now and government was thinking it could sell of reservoirs so it could be brought back and I would like to see some security against this private property on the reservoirs again.

There are some commercial operations and they are limited with 30-year leases but that could be of concern too. It is an issue that hasn't really gone away but not one is paying attention to. We have had good cooperation with the cattle and forestry associations. Mining is doing a lot of good technology in improving on how they operate. We still have mud bidders around the dams and especially on the lakeshore when the reservoirs have gone down so that's still a big concern for us at least in the watersheds I am familiar with. Not that we want to stop recreation, but fishing and camping is not an issue but I wouldn't want to see our reservoirs sold off.

Ted: thank you for raising those issues and yes we have thought about the recreation values, I don't think we have included it here but it would be included in the conversation about how we continue recreation without necessarily having long-term impacts.

Tricia: Mayor Fortin thank you for what you said, I echo a lot of those comments, especially the one with the lack of control. Regional districts, water purveyors aren't referred to on any of the plans and we give our input but we see the actions still going forward so that is the current issue of the day. Ted, your point about being opposed to water centric planning, I understand that, but I would be curious to see what water centric planning would look like and considering all the different perspectives in the watershed and what that would look like if we considered water first but that's another aside. Incorporating some of the WSA tools is an important towards water objectives and water sustainability plans. They seem like they maybe cumbersome tools and in the past there has been this idea that we will take some cases and test them out maybe some pilots here and there and then they never seem to continue after

that because it's been realized that some of the processes are cumbersome.

I would encourage this will be different this time and we can have something that can be used on a broader scale and not just a couple test cases to see how things play out and I'm not sure if the waters sustainability objectives and plans are under consideration for those types of things but just something that can be applied broadly.

Ted: really good points and I'm not going to sugar coat it, we haven't done a great job at figuring out on how to enable the water objectives and the reason for that is someone needs to take up the mantle and do it. What often happens with these planning provisions is they're triggered under duress. So you have some major event or issue that says we actually need to sit down now and develop a plan so that we can reconcile these competing pressures and values on that particular interest. I couldn't agree more, we need to find a way to amplify the tools that we do have and put them to effect under broad application as oppose to site-specific applications. I think that is very much in play for the conversation we want going into the water security strategy engagement – how do we do planning, who should do it, how does it get triggered, how do the toolsets that we have now under legislation effective and if we haven't been able to actually use them yet, we can't really answer that question until we do the planning.

Victor: We had the catastrophic fire of 2017, it was a group of four economists and 3 foresters that wrote the report for the province its socio-economic impact. Tricia and Renee Clark who have done the heavy lifting on our watersheds here in the North Okanagan related to drinking water and up in the Aberdeen plateau, we have this problem of inconsistency between where the costs and benefits show up and this is an on-going challenge. Unless you bring in the dollars to question, you get stuck with this huge gap so Greater Vernon Water, third largest water purveyor in the province, constantly deals with rising expectation for water quality from a health point of view and less and less control of how to manage that. So the costs are driven to us by purifying as well as addressing all the issues that all others are free to play in. In your opening lines you need to be very clear that there is this conundrum that has to be addresses otherwise we sit here in a decade from now with exactly the same conundrum, we have made no progress whatsoever.

The other thing that is missing in your slides – I encourage you to add three words – urgency,

magnitude and known action. We are fully aware of the urgency of this. If we have a catastrophic fire in the plateau, it effects Lake Country, ourselves and water purveyors in Kelowna. We are in trouble in the magnitude of 20-25 million/year to try and deal with water quality issues and yet funding to manage lakes comes out in \$10,000 blocks. The magnitude is wrong and urgency is out of line with climate change. We know that from the 2017 fires, we know from the rest of the province and we know already some basic actions have to be done. So I appreciate your policy shot and I think my suggestion is that you don't go through a two- or three-year process of dragging this forward. You have to drive in on two parallel lines and one is we know all this already and here is what can happen in the very short-run – you've got to run on these streams immediately and really strengthen your hand by having a bunch of knowns and we need to work on these things now and then we can do this slow long grind and re-talk about what we have already talked about and talk about these conundrums.

Ted: Thanks so much. This is the feedback we are looking for. I can say without question, that the impacts of climate change are much more in the minds of our political masters than they ever have been before, as a result of 2017, as a result of the flooding in the Okanagan. We are not having to talk about this in academic terms anymore, it is very real. I will let you know that this notion of immediate action weighed against building out systems of governance and planning. They have different cadences and work at different scales. Thanks for that feedback and we will absolutely take that back if you're okay with me representing you in government channels, I would be happy to do that.

Scott: I think that wraps that up for questions today but I know a number of us will be reaching out to you to talk more about this strategy and fund. Thank you for your presentation.

Ted: Jennifer is the lead on this and you can always contact me of course. Feel free to reach out to both of us.

Anna: Both of you are welcome to stay, we have presentations coming up from the Water Stewardship Council on some of the leading watershed security issues in the Okanagan.

Ted: Unfortunately, I would love to stay but I actually have the McKenzie River Basin Board, I'm a board member there and I had to jump out of that meeting to join this one and they are

expecting me back on but absolutely look forward to have an opportunity again in the near future.

5. COUNCIL COMMITTEE PRESENTATIONS

Council chairs from terms 8 and 9 (2019-2021) presented their committee's activities over this period including objectives, issues, outcomes/key findings. In the case of the policy and agriculture and water committees which are continuing into the next term, the chair presented the next steps for the committee. Presentation slides are appended here for reference.

6. ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Victor: Amazing sets of work over the last number of years so thank you so much.

James B: Great job, don't know what you're doing retiring we need you to keep advocating for this. We are looking to see some of the things that need to be done in the watershed to fruition and fairly quick time. Senior government should have all the information they need to give us the programmes that we can work on. As mayor Cummings said, the fire mitigation would help a lot and some type of forestry work that is a little more environmentally friendly than total clear cuts so I would like to see that. I would like to thank Bernie for all the work on the dam as well. Great presentation this morning and a lot of information that has to get into action plans.

Anna: When Reenie came to present to the OBWB, she came with recommendations of communications to the Minister of the Environment. We suggested that we wait those communications after we have these sessions from Ted and Jennifer and get a sense of where the government is going right now and also after we have heard from WSC. I just wanted to let everyone know that over the next few weeks we're going to be working on a communication thanking the Minister of Environment and appreciating the presentations that Ted and Jennifer did and also providing some of the recommendations that came out of the stewardship council today.

7. WRAP UP

Sue: I am totally overwhelmed by the amount of work that all of you have done to look at water issues. It's phenomenal and I want to thank each and every one of you to share your thoughts. I would like to thank our staff at OBWB. They

coordinate all of this and they do a terrific job so thank you Anna Warwick Sears, Nelson Jatel, James Littley, Corrine Jackson, Kellie Garcia and Carolina Restrepo. You seem to coordinate it and understand it all, thank you for that. I would like to say to all of you, as I was listening to this today, all of these people are going to be invited to our Lake Osoyoos Water Science Forum which is in October. It's the fourth one and OBWB is coordinating this and all of you are going to learn more than you wanted to. We are going to have presenters from all over BC, all over the U.S. because the IJC is working with this as well and I think that all of you presented today would be most interested and would be included in presenting. Please come and join us for that, Carolina will be sending you presentations for that.

Anna: I just wanted to build on what you said. Brian Guy is the programme committee chair for the Osoyoos Lake Science Forum so if you have any ideas for presentations you can share them with Brian and Carolina.

Sue: I just want to thank all of you for this

CERTIFIED CORRECT:

Chair

Executive

Director

wonderful

informative morning of learning about all of the issues that affect us all under the term water and I look forward to doing this again next year and thank

you all very much. If there is nothing else, I will entertain a motion to adjourn this meeting.

8. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting date of the OWSC is to be confirmed for June, 10th, 2021.

9. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned by at 12:01 pm.

***“That there being no further business,
the meeting of the Okanagan Water
Stewardship Council of May 4th 2021 be
adjourned.”***

***Moved by Director Bob Fleming and
seconded by Director Rick Knodel.***