



2020-2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

Okanagan Basin Water Board

The 2020-2024 Strategic Plan is intended to guide the OBWB's work for the next five years. The plan reflects our priorities, and our unique strengths, and the way we carry out our work. The plan is a framework for future projects, programs, partnerships and decisions. It will create clarity for our partners, and help us shape our work together.

This plan focuses on actions that can be undertaken by the OBWB, complementing the Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy¹, and the planning initiatives of Okanagan communities. The plan describes key activities, and our role in supporting actions by diverse partners.



OBWB Board of Directors, 2020

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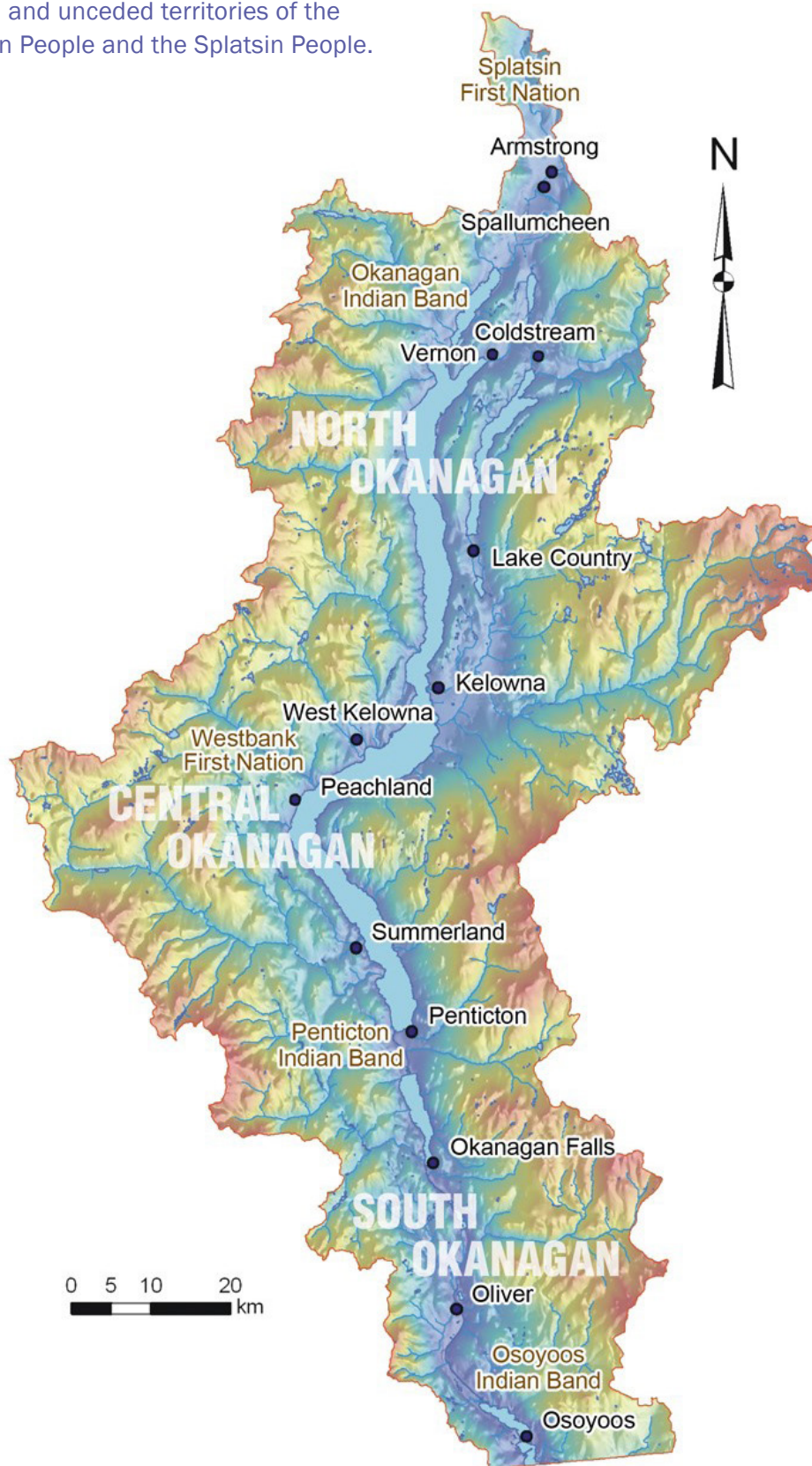
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WHY A STRATEGIC PLAN?

The world is changing rapidly. The global economy is bringing unexpected stresses, global climate change is creating unpredictable swings in weather, and within the next 30 years the global population will grow from 7.8 billion to 9.7 billion people. Although these are world-wide processes, their effects on water are local. We enjoy healthy water in the Okanagan – from the drinking water in our taps to the clear blue waters of our lakes. But we also experience water problems – from pollution to shortages to flooding – and many of the solutions are local. Working locally, we have the capacity and agency to respond to external change.

The OBWB supports the work of Okanagan communities, and all sectors of Okanagan society, to collectively improve the way water is managed in the valley. We want to be a centre for collaboration and creativity. We also want to strengthen and grow partnerships with Okanagan Indigenous communities, because of our mutual responsibility to care for water, and in the spirit of reconciliation. We believe that thinking strategically about these approaches allows us all to make best use of human and financial resources – finding the right solutions and making the right decisions to adapt to a changing climate. It also allows us to accommodate our growing population while protecting the natural environment – so that the Okanagan continues to have an excellent quality of life.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board works within the traditional, and unceded territories of the Syilx/Okanagan People and the Spltasin People.





INTRODUCTION TO THE OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD (OBWB)

The Vision of the OBWB is for the valley to have clean and healthy water in perpetuity, meeting the needs of natural ecosystems, residents and agriculture.

The OBWB's mission is to provide leadership to protect and enhance quality of life in the Okanagan Basin through sustainable water management. The OBWB was initiated in 1968 as a collaborative local government agency, to identify and resolve critical water issues in the Okanagan. We link and catalyze water initiatives throughout the valley.

The OBWB's strength is in our partnerships: bringing people and resources together, and providing a means for joint strategic action. We advocate for local water concerns to senior governments, and are a public voice for water education. Our financial structure enables us to bring together funds from many sources – creating new opportunities based on regional collaborations and goals. We have the capacity to deliver complex, multi-partner projects.

The Okanagan is a leader for many of Canada's water issues. We have among the lowest water availability per person, and many water-dependent industries. With less water available, we must protect water quality, so it can be used and re-used for many purposes – while preserving environmental flows and environmental health. Few comparable examples exist, so we must be innovative in our water policy and water management. This has been our history, and this will also be the key to our future.





OBWB PURPOSE OR MANDATE

The OBWB's mandate² was established in 1969 through the *Municipalities Enabling and Validating Act* and Supplementary Letters Patent to the Okanagan regional districts, to:

- » Organize or receive proposals from private interests, organizations or agencies and all levels of governments regarding best practices for water use and management;
- » Define water problems and priorities, economic feasibility of solutions, responsibility, necessary legislation and required action;
- » Communicate and coordinate between levels of government and their agencies about water use and management;
- » Present proposals and recommendations to local or senior governments, according to jurisdiction and responsibility;
- » Participate financially or otherwise, in surveys, investigations or projects on behalf of Okanagan local governments;
- » Coordinate implementation of the Okanagan Basin Study Plan (1974) – for water management activities that affect the Valley as a whole;
- » Advise local or senior government agencies when proposed actions, regulations or bylaws are contrary to the Okanagan Basin Study Plan or OBWB recommendations; and
- » Participate in an aquatic weed control program for Okanagan lakes.

² See www.obwb.ca/board-of-directors/governance/

CURRENT SITUATION

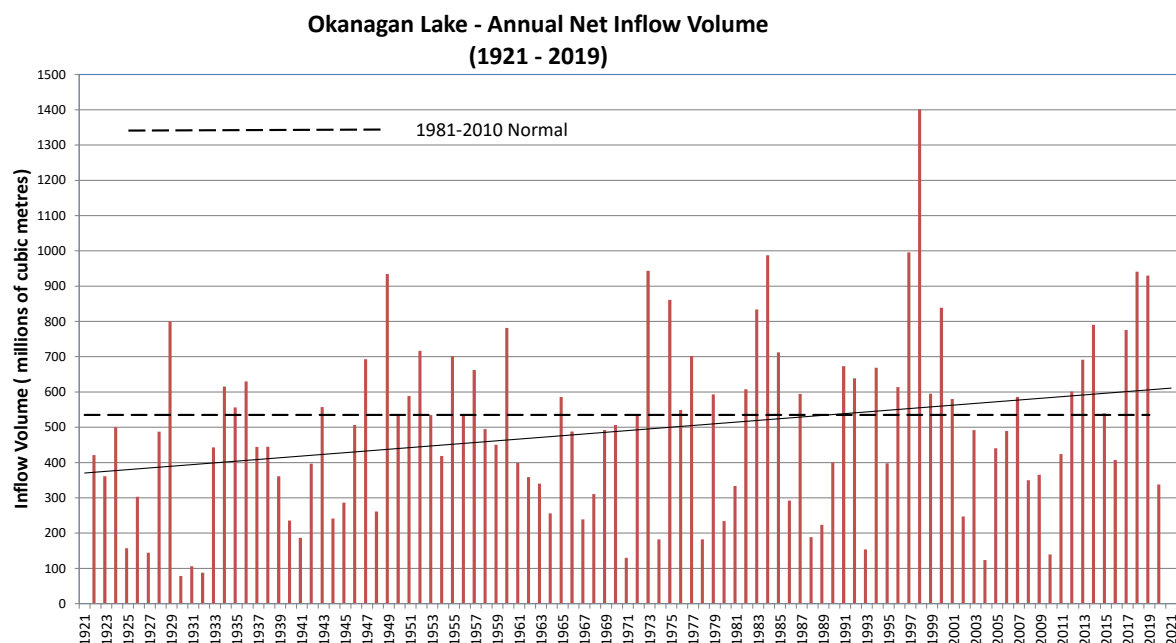
The Okanagan region has many advantages – mild and sunny weather, deep lakes, and a dramatic backdrop of grassy hills and forested mountains. As a result, students, young families and retirees are moving to the valley from other parts of Canada and around the world to enjoy this beautiful place. New residents bring vitality, culture and economic growth to our region, and local communities are making plans to accommodate them. However, we are working with a legacy of past planning decisions that have not been gentle to the environment. Our ecosystems are stressed through intense development on floodplains, loss of wetlands and riparian areas, and resource extraction. Our growing communities are vulnerable to climate change, which will bring more intense droughts, floods, and storms.

The “drought of record” was marked by three consecutive years of low rainfall beginning in 1929. The population of the valley was much smaller then, and there was less extensive agriculture. A multi-year extended drought now could make it very difficult to manage water systems and provide for all needs. A

climate-driven shift from winter snow to winter rain could also lead to water shortages even if overall precipitation is the same, because there may not be enough storage in lakes and reservoirs to hold the water necessary. The “flood of record” was in 1894, and had far greater volume than the most recent damaging floods of 2017 and 2018. These historical events remind us that even if climate change were not occurring, the Okanagan is vulnerable to extreme drought and flood. **Figure 1** shows that the amount of inflow each year fluctuates wildly. Average years are rare. Instead we must plan for changing conditions.

We have great potential to strengthen our resilience. Okanagan communities have many advantages, compared to elsewhere in B.C. A spirit of innovation exists here, balanced with a respect for maintaining the quality of the environment – especially the water. As we better understand the causes and solutions for environmental stress, we can make strong, integrated community-based plans and decisions that reduce human impacts to our water in this time of change.

Figure 1



Source: BC River Forecast Centre, Ministry of Natural Resource Operations

OBWB OPERATING PRINCIPLES AND CORE VALUES³

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- » **One Valley – One Water.** Our actions and decisions will recognize that all water in the Okanagan is connected, in all its forms and sources.
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- » **Transparency.** Our actions and decisions will be transparent and open.
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- » **Collaboration.** We will seek collaborative solutions to water concerns, to bridge the interests of all Okanagan citizens and orders of government, and to help resolve water conflicts.
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- » **Informed Action.** We will undertake actions that are informed by the best available science and the expertise of the community.
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- » **Credibility.** We will be a reliable source of water science and information for the Okanagan, and a hub for water research.
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- » **Balance.** We will take a non-partisan approach, and balance environmental, social, and economic interests.
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- » **Sharing.** We will share knowledge, data and information, contributing to the creation of resilient community water plans, and educating citizens.
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- » **Innovation.** We will be committed to innovation, seeking out new ideas and approaches, while at the same time respecting and drawing on historical knowledge.
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- » **Leaving a Legacy.** We will consider the needs of our children and grandchildren, as well as those of the present, looking ahead to protect water in times of change.
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³ From the OBWB Governance Manual

LONG-TERM GOALS/ STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



Goal 1: Delivering our mandate across all projects and programs

Over 50 years, as the Okanagan Valley has grown and changed, the OBWB has adapted to meet community needs. Looking forward, we need to maintain a stable and flexible organization and remain open to new challenges. The OBWB has a strong organizational structure, with board, staff and the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council working together. We must stay awake to trends and understand how needs are changing. At the same time, we are valued for consistency and reliability – aligned with our mandate. We create capacity for all Okanagan communities to continuously improve the sustainability of Okanagan water, regardless of the pace of change.

Sub-goal 1 (a): Water management in the Okanagan is not limited by funding or capacity.

As both a grant maker and recipient of senior government funding, and by tapping the expertise of the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council (the council or OWSC), the OBWB has accelerated funding for water in the valley. Seed funding to and from our partners – local governments, universities, improvement districts and other organizations – triggers new funds from many sources. External funding may come to OBWB or to any partner to benefit Okanagan water. The OBWB also has the ability to leverage in-kind contributions, which can be as valuable as cash.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The OBWB diversifies funding sources for water initiatives in the valley, securing new funding partners and leveraging those through further partnerships. The OBWB also identifies and advocates for new senior government funding and policies to support water initiatives.

Sub-goal 1 (b): The OBWB is a respected advocate for water concerns.

The OBWB has a mandate to make recommendations to local and senior governments, to improve water management in the Okanagan, and to advocate for needed changes in legislation. To be most effective, the OBWB seeks to provide information of the highest quality, maintaining a balanced approach and professional standards. This requires the board, staff and council to continuously learn about water issues and trends, and find the OBWB's role to promote solutions. The OBWB is objective, transparent and non-partisan.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The OBWB maintains close communication with all levels of government, with our network of water experts and the public – to understand needs and challenges. Through ongoing learning, the board, staff and council continuously enhance the quality of information and advice we provide. The OBWB will use this information to provide advice to all levels of government where appropriate.



Sub-goal 1(c): The Okanagan public is knowledgeable about local water issues, and are active and engaged with furthering water sustainability.

The public are essential partners for all of our work. By bridging the communications of local water providers and water-related agencies, the OBWB supports consistent public outreach, reducing costs and increasing social impact. Giving information to our citizens helps reduce waste, and builds support for water protection and improvements.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The Okanagan public has a broad common understanding of Okanagan water challenges and the value of water, and are engaged and active in creating and implementing solutions.



Sub-goal 1(d): The OWSC extends the OBWB's knowledge and communications, and provides insight and advice on current and future water issues.

The OWSC is an essential partner of the OBWB and is formally established in our legislation. Through their respective organizations, members represent all corners of the water sector, sharing expertise and strategic information across a wide range of water issues. The OWSC's advice and analysis supports the OBWB's role in advocating for Okanagan water concerns. Members also share information back to their wider networks, raising the collective knowledge of the broader community.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The OWSC improves the quality of the OBWB's programs and projects, diversifies our partnerships, and increases our credibility with the broader community. The OWSC supports the OBWB in our strategic initiatives, and assists with developing policy recommendations to senior government. The board and council meet together at least once a year, and members of the board and council attend each other's monthly meetings.

Goal 2: Water is managed for all needs, under all conditions

Water shortages are common in dry years and recently there have also been historic floods in the Okanagan. Under extreme conditions, with variable snow pack, we risk dry streams and drawing down lakes during multiyear droughts and being swamped with water in wet years. Many conflicts can be avoided with careful management and planning based on good science and data. The best and least costly way to access more water in dry years is through conservation. The best and least costly way to reduce flood risk is to improve land use planning and policy, use green infrastructure, and restore natural systems.

Sub-goal 2 (a): Local communities have plans in place and the capacity to prepare for and respond to climate change impacts on water.

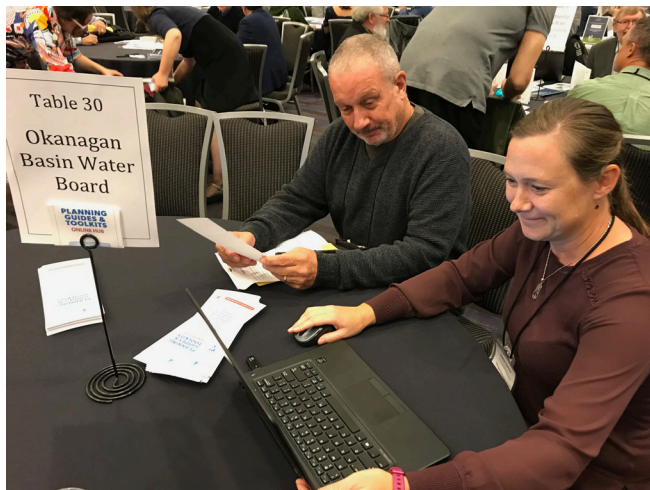
By coordinating local efforts, securing external funding, and sharing information and best practices we can help local governments create better plans at lower cost for drought and flood response and mitigation, to improve water quality, and to enhance the resilience of water systems. Mitigation through planning and policy changes is often more effective, durable, and cost-effective than building dikes or expanding reservoirs. The OBWB has a key role to support planning among local governments, Indigenous communities, and utilities, and to support valley-wide planning efforts.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The Okanagan has a sustainable water supply and robust system to manage water for human and environmental needs, with plans and policies that support healthy communities and a resilient economy while reducing conflicts between sectors.

Sub-goal 2 (b): The Okanagan has sufficient, accessible, water data to adapt to weather extremes, to changes in the economy, and to population growth.

We can't manage what we don't measure. To ensure water security, and equitable water sharing between different sectors and needs, we must understand how much water enters the valley, in what location, where it is needed, and how these factors change from year to year. This information forms the backbone of planning and emergency preparedness. Data accessibility includes being able to use and understand the data. The OBWB will support and coordinate water data collection and accessibility without duplicating the role of senior government.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The OBWB identifies what water data is needed for a base level of water management, supporting surface and groundwater monitoring to achieve this target level, and supporting data storage, analysis and sharing where there is no other agency performing these functions.





Sub-goal 2 (c): The Okanagan has the best available water science and models to sustainably manage surface and groundwater.

The Okanagan's hydrology is changing. Water and climate models are needed to understand this change, and to support infrastructure planning, flood mitigation, water allocations, environmental flows, and other water management planning. Much less is known about groundwater than surface water, and it is a priority to better understand our aquifers. As technology and data improve, and as the climate and population patterns change, we will continue to improve and update these models.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The OBWB continues to improve models of climate, surface and groundwater, by securing funding, leading projects, coordinating efforts and building partnerships, to support water models, planning and management.

Sub-goal 2 (d): All sectors in the Okanagan use water efficiently.

The least costly way to expand water availability and increase the resilience of water supplies is to decrease demand by reducing waste, in a consistent manner across water delivery systems. Actions may include upgrading irrigation systems, stopping leaks, metering end users, developing conservation plans, and conducting outreach campaigns, among other approaches. Improving water efficiency is insurance against harm caused by shortages, and reduces burdens on delivery systems during wet years when there are high-turbidity events. Reducing demand also saves the costs and energy needed to pump, treat and deliver water. Water purveyors should have consistent language and approaches to water efficiency campaigns and the application of watering restrictions. The OBWB supports these actions by increasing communication and highlighting best practices, facilitating consistent planning and coordination.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The OBWB assists water purveyors, agriculture and other industries to improve water efficiency by sharing data and information, promoting best practices and supporting consistent approaches in long-term water supply planning and public outreach on water conservation and efficiency.

Sub-goal 2 (e): Water is managed and regulated in a way that protects the needs of the environment, agriculture, and communities over the long term.

Water use and management is primarily regulated by the province, who oversees licensing and requirements to maintain stream flows, regulates lake levels, and looks after dam safety, among other things. Local communities and water suppliers manage water distribution for their customers, and may manage environmental flow releases from reservoirs. Local jurisdictions can also have powers for land use regulation that affect water quality and the availability of water for the environment, as well as drought response and flood risk reduction. The OBWB has a mandate to identify problems with regulations and policy, and/or how they are executed, as well as potential remedies.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The OBWB works with partners to identify gaps in policy, planning and regulation for water management, makes recommendations to all levels of government, and assists with solutions.

Goal 3: Maintaining excellent water quality in the Okanagan

Water quality can be difficult to manage because small sources of pollution add up to big problems. Source protection falls into three areas: upper-watershed lakes and streams; agricultural areas; and developed cities, towns and roadways. Different actions are needed for each. Healthy riparian areas and wetlands protect water quality and reduce runoff. Aquatic invasive species are a specific kind of water pollution. Local communities need the tools and resources to maintain the quality of water sources and aquatic habitats, and provide safe drinking water.

Sub-goal 3 (a): The OBWB has the data and research needed to fully understand risks to source water, and how to manage those risks.

Source protection is one of the most complex issues facing the Okanagan. We rely on healthy lakes and streams for our drinking water, but we have multi-use watersheds under provincial jurisdiction, and our main valley lakes and most productive aquifers are surrounded by urban development and agriculture. Risk assessment, planning and response are ongoing challenges as our population increases. Water quality monitoring requires coordination, and more work is needed to expand water quality data collection and accessibility.

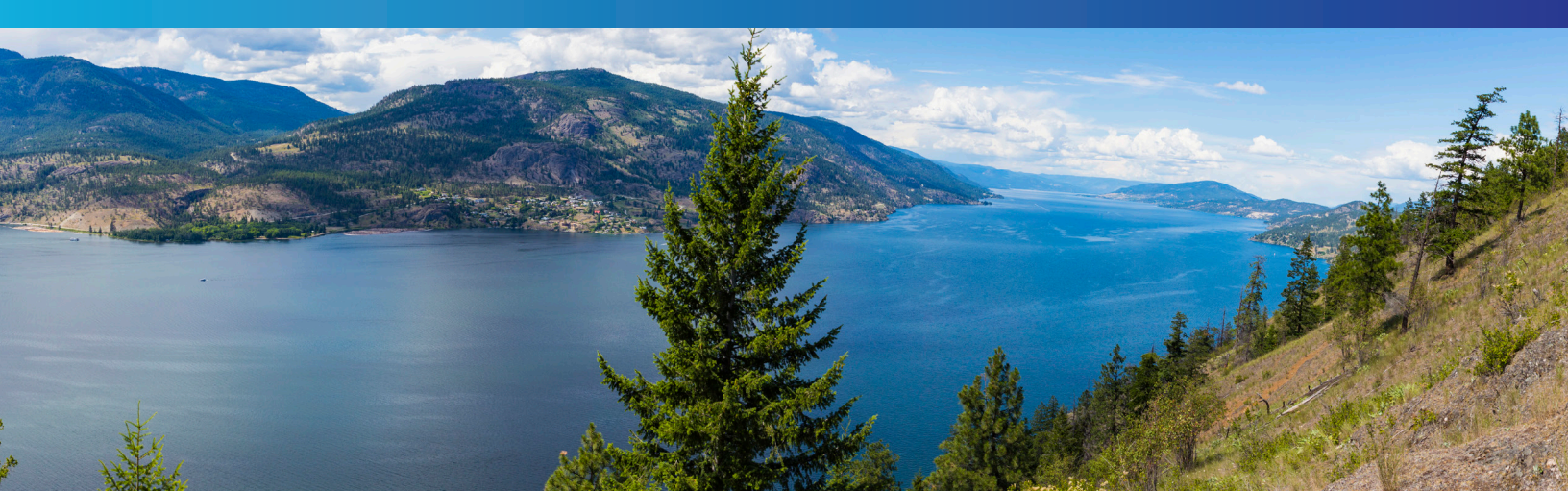
Desired Outcomes and Actions: There are consistent water quality baselines, indicators and targets for water quality in the Okanagan. The OBWB supports research and data collection, and helps to promote best practices and to share and manage water quality data.

Sub-goal 3 (b): Communities and sectors collaborate on approaches to protect water quality.

Many source protection conflicts can be reduced through policy and management practices. The province, Indigenous Peoples, water purveyors, and a large number of different resource users are finding ways to work collaboratively on source protection to minimize the impact of range uses, resource development, and recreation. There is a need for additional research, policy, and planning so that approaches are consistent throughout the watershed.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: Local governments, water purveyors, Okanagan Indigenous communities, provincial agencies and other partners, including the public, work collaboratively on source protection. The OBWB supports these collaborations, research and policy development, and advocates to senior governments for water-protective policies.





Sub-goal 3 (c): Pollution is reduced in developed areas through infrastructure improvements and policies that limit contamination of surface and ground waters.

Although wastewater treatment has reduced sewage pollution overall, a growing population and resulting development has increased the volume of stormwater. This has increased the need to reduce pollution from stormwater and to better understand emerging contaminants. Stormwater flows mostly untreated into the valley lakes, potentially polluting one of our primary drinking sources and our greatest natural asset. During intense rain events – expected to occur more frequently with climate change – stormwater can flood small neighborhood streams with contaminated water. Infrastructure improvements, sized for climate change, along with best planning practices, are essential; supported with good policies by local and provincial governments.

Desired Outcomes and Actions:
Local communities have funding and capacity to coordinate and improve stormwater and wastewater plans. The OBWB shares information, assists with communication and coordination, and helps secure funding for plans and infrastructure improvement.

Sub-goal 3 (d): Okanagan communities understand the value of green infrastructure systems, and the condition of our existing natural assets, and have plans and policies to protect and restore them.

Wetlands, riparian areas and other natural buffers protect water quality, mitigate flooding and erosion, and have many other values as green infrastructure, especially for stormwater treatment. Communities need regularly updated inventories of sensitive areas, and plans and policies to protect, restore and maintain them over time. Engineered natural systems, like constructed wetlands, have many of the same functions that nature provides.

Desired Outcomes and Actions:
Communities in the Okanagan successfully identify, inventory and evaluate natural assets, and protect and restore green infrastructure. The OBWB supports this work, and helps to secure funding.



Sub-goal 3 (e): Harmful new aquatic invasive species, including zebra and quagga mussels, are kept out of the Okanagan, and Eurasian watermilfoil continues to be controlled.

It is impossible to eradicate aquatic invasive species once they enter the Okanagan lake system, as the OBWB has experienced with watermilfoil. Only the provincial and federal governments have authority to inspect boats and equipment at B.C.'s borders. The province is coordinating efforts to educate boaters and recreational users who can unknowingly spread invasive species. The role of the OBWB and local communities is to both advocate for prevention and to think ahead about management options for current and potential invasive species. We have a long-standing mandate to manage watermilfoil, and if necessary to support mitigation efforts for other aquatic invasive species.

Desired Outcomes and Actions:
No new invasive aquatic species are introduced into the watershed, and watermilfoil is successfully managed in the mainstem lakes. The OBWB advocates for inspections, regulations and controls; educates the public to raise awareness of the potential threats and future costs of new invasive species; and continues to actively manage watermilfoil.

Goal 4: Advancing Partnerships with Okanagan Indigenous Communities

The governments of Canada and British Columbia have committed to recognizing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Significant changes in senior government policy will be coming, and local governments have an important role to advance reconciliation. The OBWB will take steps to further our engagement and partnerships with Okanagan Indigenous communities, committing to ongoing learning about Indigenous culture, Indigenous values with respect to water, and rights of self-determination.



Sub-goal 4 (a): The OBWB's directors, staff and council members are knowledgeable about the history, culture and values of Okanagan Indigenous communities with respect to water.

Education and understanding are essential for strong partnerships, and non-Indigenous communities have had few opportunities to learn about the Indigenous history, culture and values of the Okanagan, and the ways that traditional knowledge complements Western science. Okanagan Indigenous communities have a strong vision for the future, which can inform OBWB's projects and programs.

Desired Outcomes and Actions:
The OBWB seeks out opportunities for engagement and learning from Okanagan Indigenous communities. The OBWB works with Indigenous communities to support and participate in meetings, workshops, and field activities.

Sub-goal 4 (b): The OBWB has solid long-term partnerships with Okanagan Indigenous communities focused on advancing mutual goals to protect Okanagan water quality and supply.

The OBWB has had many partnerships with the Okanagan Nation Alliance and individual Indigenous communities in the valley, including projects on environmental flow needs and wetland restoration. There are many opportunities for aligning efforts, including potential for projects incorporating traditional knowledge and Western science. While undertaking these partnerships, the OBWB will respect the self-determination of Indigenous communities, and strive to abide by their principles established for data sovereignty.

Desired Outcomes and Actions: The OBWB and Okanagan Indigenous communities have increased their joint collaboration on projects that meet mutual water management goals. The OBWB works to identify and implement these collaborative projects.



APPENDIX A: TRACKING PROGRESS TOWARD THE GOALS OF THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

We will use the following tracking measures to measure progress on this plan. The measures are not comprehensive, but they are important, measureable, tangible, and directly involve the OBWB. Some of the measures represent the maintenance of best practices rather than continued expansion. Some measures have readily-available data, and others will be best tracked through a qualitative, narrative approach. Each is associated with a specific goal. The OBWB will track progress with these measures annually in our annual reports. We will report on the barriers as well as the successes over time.

Tracking measures for Goal 1: Delivering our mandate across all projects and programs

A1 (a): Funding water in the valley

- » Sum of grants to OBWB, annually and over the 5-year period of this strategic plan;
- » Sum of successful grants to OBWB partners for which OBWB staff assisted with application.

A1 (b): Change through informed advocacy

- » Clear examples of government policy changes, consistent with OBWB advocacy.

A1 (c): Educated public

- » Okanagan WaterWise survey results measuring changes in public knowledge about water availability, water quality, and invasive aquatic species.

A1 (d): OWSC engagement

- » The attendance of OWSC members at meetings, and the diversity of the sectors attending;
- » The number of letters, reports and other documents prepared by OWSC members for OBWB.

Tracking measures for Goal 2: Managing water for all needs, under all conditions

A2 (a): Plans for climate adaptation

- » Number of drought and flood response plans and reports, and other climate adaptation-related initiatives developed by the OBWB, or with OBWB assistance.

A2 (b): Availability of water data

- » Benchmark analysis of where hydrometric and weather stations are needed for water management in the Okanagan;
- » Number of hydrometric stations under operation with publicly-available data, including Water Survey stations, and independently-operated stations;
- » Number of climate/weather stations under operation with publicly-available data, including government-operated stations, and independently-operated stations.

A2 (c): Excellent water science

- » The number and scope of initiatives, with OBWB involvement, to improve Okanagan models of surface flow, groundwater, and groundwater/surface water connections.

A2 (d): Improving water efficiency

- » The number and scope of initiatives, with OBWB involvement, to improve Okanagan water use efficiency.

A2 (e): Managing water for all needs

- » Water management is primarily a provincial responsibility, although Indigenous and local governments also have significant roles. As the OBWB has a mandate to identify gaps, make recommendations, and assist with solutions, the tracking measure should be a narrative of the successes and failures related to water management over the life of this plan.



Tracking measures for Goal 3: Maintaining excellent water quality in the Okanagan

A3 (a): Understanding risks to source waters

- » The number, scope and progress of initiatives, with OBWB involvement, related to research, data collection, and the development of baselines and targets for source water quality.

A3 (b): Fostering collaborative approaches

- » The number of formal new Okanagan source assessments and source protection plans, as well as their consistency among water purveyors;
- » OBWB advocacy for provincial policy changes to protect water quality.

A3 (c): Pollution reduction through policy and infrastructure

- » Demonstrated improvements to stormwater management in the Okanagan, with OBWB involvement, including infrastructure, plans and policies.

A3 (d): Supporting green infrastructure

- » The number and scope of green infrastructure initiatives, with OBWB involvement, including physical green infrastructure as well as plans and policies that support green infrastructure.

A3 (e): Preventing and controlling aquatic invasive species

- » The measure of OBWB's successful management of invasive milfoil on public beaches and boating areas;
- » The scope and success of prevention measures and advocacy to exclude invasive mussels.

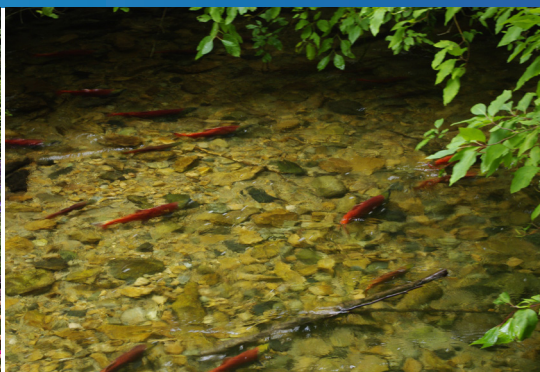
Tracking measures for Goal 4: Advancing partnerships with Okanagan Indigenous Communities

A4 (a): Increasing knowledge about Okanagan Indigenous history, culture and values

- » The number of Indigenous-led workshops, training sessions and other education opportunities attended or undertaken by OBWB board, staff, and members of the OWSC each year.

A4 (b): Partnerships with Indigenous communities

- » The number and scope of initiatives, new and ongoing, undertaken in partnership with Okanagan Indigenous communities.



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