

news

Water conservation still key this summer

By Barry Gerding

For Okanagan communities dealing with flooding issues, worrying about a shortfall of water this summer might be hard to contemplate.

But the need for communities to plan ahead and brace for anticipated drought conditions with more than normal plus-30 Celsius days forecast for this summer, water conservation remains top of mind for the Okanagan Basin Water Board and Okanagan community mayors.

It is that concern which is behind the annual launch of the “Make Water Work” outdoor water consumption reduction campaign. The campaign kick-off was held in Kelowna, surrounded by the xeriscape gardens outside the H2O Adventure and Fitness Centre.

“Why launch a water conservation campaign

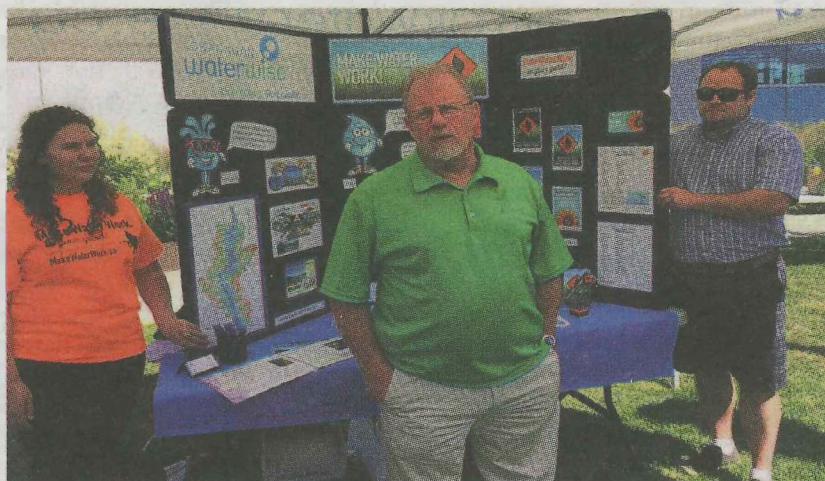
when there seems to be an abundance of water? Because we still need to conserve water in this valley,” said Corinne Jackson, OBWB communications director.

“At this time, for different reasons, communities are already implementing watering restrictions, in part for some to help protect water treatment plants being overwhelmed by water.”

As well, she noted, Okanagan Lake’s high water levels will eventually recede and we are looking ahead to a dryer than normal summer.

Tracy Gray, Kelowna city councillor and chair of the OBWB, said weather extremes have become a fact of life in the Okanagan, whether from season to season or year to year.

“This year, the snow pillow was below normal at our monitoring stations in March so



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West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater.

we can see now how things can change quickly,” Gray said.

“We live in a unique situation here, but with climate change and potential for these extreme weather events, we need to be more water conscious.”

Gray said personally, she and her husband have adapted their yard to reduce water needs by removing cedars and some of their lawn, replacing them with xeriscape drought-toler-

ant plants.

West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater picked up on the dry outdoor conditions leading to forest fires, noting the Blue Grouse Mountain fire this week grew to 2.5 hectares “in no time at all.”

Findlater said outdoor watering restrictions will be imposed shortly in his community and despite the high water volumes in valley lakes and streams, he says the

dry season is already upon us.

At home, Findlater said his home has widespread shade from a canopy of tall maple trees, so the grass doesn’t grow as fast.

“We don’t use much water on our grass and I probably only cut the lawn two or three times during the summer. The shade cover means the grass doesn’t grow as fast,” he said.

Ken Salvail, a local landscape designer

and supporter of the Okanagan WaterWise program, offered one conservation gardening tip—stop over-watering outdoor plants and grass.

Salvail said abundant watering teaches plants to adapt to more constant soggy, wet soil by developing a specific root system, a self adjustment to being constantly underwater.

“That is an abnormal situation for a plant. Most places have periods of rain, followed by periods of dryness, then it rains again and is dry again. That is a natural habitat for plants to live under and adjust to,” Salvail said.

He said reducing the amount of moisture in the ground also allows more oxygen to get into the soil, which is what plants also need to thrive.

“We need to teach our plants to live without water.”

Two main contests will be associated again this year with the Make Water Work campaign.

Okanagan residents who pledge to conserve water by registering at www.MakeWaterWork.ca are entered to win a \$6,000 WaterWise yard upgrade, facilitated by Salvail, plus there will be other prizes handed out.

And the community with the most pledges wins the title of “Make Water Work Champions.” Past winners include Oliver (2014), Armstrong (2015) and Peachland (2016).

Go to www.MakeWaterWork.ca for more contest information or to sign up. There is also more information on the website about sustainable yard landscaping options and a roster of drought-resistant plants compiled by Bylands Nursery and the Okanagan Xeriscape Association.