



*(Photo credit: Okanagan WaterWise)*

CONSERVATION

By Pete McIntyre

## Survey sheds new light on water use in Okanagan

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A survey of Okanagan residents on water issues suggests a vast majority of respondents practice water conservation.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), which commissioned the survey, said the results show growing concern for water issues in the valley and support for conservation and protection.

“Despite being known for our lakes, the Okanagan has among the lowest amounts of water available in Canada, and yet we have one of the highest rates of water use,” OBWB Chair Sue McKortoff said. “Anything we can do to make people aware of this precious resource, and protect it, is important.”

The water board hired an Okanagan polling firm to conduct the phone survey which included 500 residents, stratified to ensure equal representation from throughout the valley. A survey of this size is considered accurate within  $\pm 4.4$  per cent.



- a growing concern about the impacts of forest fires, invasive mussels and climate change

Whereas fires and mussels were the top two concerns in 2014 [the last time a survey was conducted], the climate crisis has risen to #3.

- 85 per cent of respondents stated they practice water conservation

Among those who say they conserve, the number one method identified was watering their yard less (53 per cent of responses).

“This is good news as this is truly where Okanagan residents can have the greatest impact on their consumption and the reason for the OBWB-Okanagan WaterWise “Make Water Work” campaign,” Corinne Jackson, communications director for the Kelowna-based water board, said.

Other conservation methods used: 43 per cent indicated they wash clothes with fuller loads (up from 37 per cent in 2014) and 39 per cent use the dishwasher less with fuller loads (up from 19 per cent in 2014). Some 18 per cent indicated they changed to low-water landscape (up from 10 per cent in 2014).

- 52 per cent said they protect water quality

Among the top ways they protect water they: do not put anything down the storm drain (63 per cent), don't flush unused medications and return them to the pharmacy (34 per cent), do not wash fats, oil or grease down the drain and instead dispose in the garbage (33 per cent). Another 26 per cent said they do not use chemical fertilizers on lawn or garden. As for those who don't protect water quality, 68 per cent were not sure why or hadn't thought about it.

“As water utilities try to address ongoing water quality issues, the importance of messaging ways to keep the water clean is becoming a growing issue. And not just in the valley bottom, but also in the backcountry – the source of water for many residents,” Jackson added.

- 85 per cent have heard of invasive zebra and quagga mussels; 55 per cent have heard the OBWB-OkWaterWise's “Don't Move A Mussel” (DMM) message

Among those surveyed, awareness of the DMM message is highest with watercraft owners (73 per cent), respondents 18 to 39 years old (76 per cent), and males (64 per cent). And, when asked the purpose of the DMM message, 64 per cent said to clean your watercraft before going into the lake (up from 36 per cent in 2014).

“With continued concern about the introduction of invasive mussels into our waters, it is great to see the level of awareness for this issue and the understanding that ‘Clean, Drain, Dry’ is an important solution to keeping it out,” Jackson said.

For more on the OBWB, [click here](#).