

The Myth of Abundance

Last weekend I previewed a DVD, directed by Canadian Liz Marshall, that follows the work of Maude Barlow. This award-winning documentary, “Water on the Table”, examines the question: should clean, potable water be declared a human right, or should it be a marketable commodity like lumber, grain or oil?

A number of people, both Canadians and Americans, are interviewed at various times throughout the documentary: some with views similar to Ms. Barlow’s, others with opposing thoughts.

At one point during the DVD, Ms. Barlow states there is a “Myth of Abundance” when it comes to Canadian water resources. In other words people, including Canadians (perhaps *especially* Canadians), believe we have an abundant supply of clean water.

We don’t.

In 2006, a number of groups collaborated and produced a poster called “Okanagan Basin Waterscape”. The poster, available through the Geological Survey of Canada (Natural Resources Canada), is subtitled: “Water – the myth of abundance”.

Sound familiar?

The Okanagan Basin Waterscape poster has ‘an abundance’ of good information specifically directed to the Okanagan Valley.

It’s not just human water needs, conveyed primarily by Okanagan municipalities, to take into account when considering the need for water. Aquatic life and wildlife need healthy streams. Recreation and industry need water. The Okanagan produces 25% of the total value of British Columbia’s agricultural products, so this sector needs its share of water as well.

With the yearly watering restrictions placed on Okanagan residents each year, we *do* have enough water resources to meet the many demands. Today. What about 10 or 15 years from now?

While the net amount of water remains relatively constant, demands on the resource are increasing. The two principle areas of rising demand lie in population growth and climate change.

According to Collier International’s report “Economic Overview and Population Stats”, average population growth of just over 1.6 percent over each of the next 15 years is forecasted for Kelowna.

If this growth means additional 'sprawl' with lots of roofs and roads that direct runoff flows directly to sewers and then into streams, population growth exacerbates the issue.

However, if the development is compact and runoff is captured and filtered naturally before it flows into groundwater, population growth can be sustained.

Climate change affects water demand more subtly. Longer, warmer and drier summers increase outdoor water demand and more water evaporates from Okanagan Lake; a longer growing season leads to an increased demand for irrigation and our forests dry out more quickly, increasing the potential for forest fires.

Fortunately, Okanagan residents have two ways to counter the inevitability of population growth and climate change. One, capture rainwater and allow it to slowly infiltrate the soil, and two, remove or reduce lawn areas and select low-water plants for the landscape.

Both of these solutions are 'doable' and they both dramatically reduce the amount of water used out-of-doors.

For our sake and for the sake of future generations, I encourage you to think seriously about how you can reduce your outdoor water use.

The award-winning documentary "Water on the Table" is being presented at 6:30 Centre Stage (Summerland) on Monday, April 18. This is one of many Earth Week events organized by the Summerland Community Cultural Development Committee. Admission is free.

Toni Boot is the founder and owner of Grasslands Nursery in Summerland, a nursery specializing in sustainable gardening. Comments and suggestions for future Water Wisdom columns may be directed to her at grassnursery@telus.net or through www.grasslandsnursery.ca