

What is the Okanagan Basin?

Okanagan Basin Waterscape

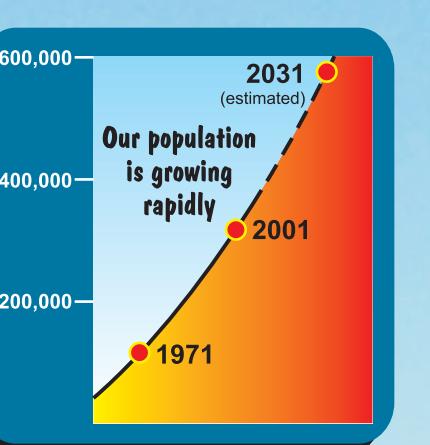
Water — the myth of abundance

Sharing our waters

There are many, many users of Okanagan Basin water and all are dependent on this limited supply. So, we must protect and share the water.



The Okanagan Basin is our home, a very special place. It has been home to First Nations peoples for thousands of years, and to many others over the last century and a half. Water has always been the basin's most valuable resource for both humans and nature. Today, our economy, agriculture, home use, and recreation continue to share these waters with nature.



We live in a dry landscape. The large lakes make water look abundant, but nature's yearly resupply is small. As our population is growing rapidly, so is our demand for water. Climate is changing and future water supplies are uncertain. Will there be enough water for our children and grandchildren? To meet the needs of humans and nature, we will have to rethink our water use, and value it more highly.

From highlands to valley floor

The highlands

The Okanagan Valley is a great trough at its edges and low in the center where the mountains rise. The Okanagan Basin includes all the land that feeds water to our big lakes, Kelowna, Vernon, Penticton, and Osoyoos all lie within the Okanagan Basin. The Okanagan River drains the land and flows south across the International Boundary as a small tributary to the Columbia River.

Where does water from the Okanagan Basin go?

Okanagan Basin water flows into the Columbia River, past the city of Portland, to the Pacific Ocean.

The valley is a busy place!

The Okanagan Valley consists of the main lakes, valley bottom, benchlands, and surrounding slopes. Most of us live down on the surrounding benchlands in Kelowna, Vernon, Penticton, and other major centres. The valley is a mix of agriculture and wineries, tourist facilities and golf courses, and industry, as well as wetland ecosystems, species at risk, and endangered habitat. With all these competing uses, we need to plan our growth carefully.

Our water cycle

Dry to really, really dry

The Okanagan Basin is dry because it lies in the rain shadow of the Coast Mountains. This high mountain chain strips moisture from Pacific storms, leaving little for the basin. The farther south you go, the drier it gets. Cacti grow in the Okanagan Basin!

The Okanagan is the main river of the Okanagan Valley. Not very big!

White Lake west of Okanagan Falls. Completely evaporates in summer leaving behind a dry lake bed of white mineral salts.

Rainfall is the main source of water in the Okanagan.

Evaporation is the main loss of water in the Okanagan.

Groundwater flow is the main source of water in the Okanagan.

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