

Water Balance Management in the Okanagan: Now What Do We Do?

by

Kim Stephens, Erik Karlsen, Ted van der Gulik and Ron Smith
of the Water Sustainability Committee of the BC Water & Waste Association

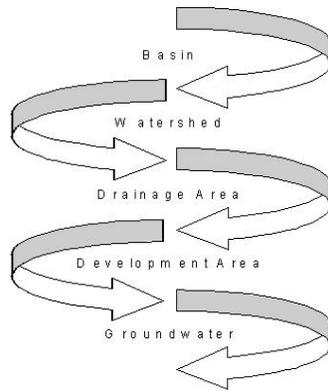
ABSTRACT

The paper will focus on the Okanagan Basin as a 'water balance area'. In this regard, the graphic below provides context for framing this question: *Water In / Water Out – What's the Balance?* Two success stories will be presented to elaborate on what can be accomplished by promoting the water balance theme as a way of integrating water management with landscape development:

Basins and Watersheds....

• **Top-down:-
supply
management**

• **Bottom-up:
demand
management**



- **Demand Management of Irrigation District Water Supplies in the Okanagan Valley** – This 1988 initiative was comprehensive in assessing the potential for domestic and irrigation water conservation. It was also the trigger for a change in philosophy that resulted in implementation of new approaches and tools.
- **Water Balance Model for British Columbia** – This decision support and scenario modelling tool is changing the way people think about the relationship between the built and natural environments, and the way we develop the urban landscape.

In the Okanagan, approximately 70 percent of water use is for agricultural purposes. Given the sheer magnitude of the agricultural component of the 'Okanagan Water Balance', one of the purposes of the paper is to provide an historical bridge from the 1988 initiative to the present that addresses these three questions:

- What is our starting point?
- Where do we want to be?
- How will we get there?

The paper will suggest expanding the application of the Water Balance Model approach to all land uses in the Okanagan, and in particular agriculture.. In the urban environment, the main focus is on the individual development site because what we do at the site scale can create opportunities for cumulative benefits over time. In applying the water balance philosophy to the Okanagan in its entirety, the proposed paradigm will be: "the Basin is the site". This will consider rainfall and infiltration as well as water used for growing and processing various agricultural products in relation to water sources. Ultimately it will both pose and suggest answers to the question: *How much of the basin's water needs will have to be found through improved practices to ensure the ongoing vitality of its communities?*