



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

**watersustainabilityproject**

## Case Study:

# *Get Water Smart, Kelowna, BC*

By Jennifer Wong

The *Get Water Smart* program in Kelowna, BC has successfully reduced water consumption through innovative metering, rate structure, home water audits and community based social marketing programs. Between 1998 and 2007, the City's total water consumption has risen by only two percent, while population has grown by 25 percent. Over the same period of time, average residential household water use has been reduced by 28.6 percent from 56 cubic meters per month to 40 cubic meters per month.

Kelowna's political environment supports a strong conservation ethic; sustainable water management is often an important municipal election issue in this desert-like community. In 2007, Kelowna City Council endorsed the Water Utility's goal of reducing citywide water use by 15 percent by the year 2012 through a Water Sustainability Action Plan. The *Get Water Smart* program has an annual operating budget of \$198,000 which finances two full-time staff, two summer students and a handful of rebate programs.

The City of Kelowna Water Utility services 64,000 water customers and is located on the shore of Lake Okanagan. The City draws its water from the lake and its biggest water challenge comes from infrastructure stress due to summer residential watering. In 1996 Kelowna faced a \$40-million infrastructure improvement and expansion over the next 10 years if the community did not improve its historical water use habits. This catalyzed a 100 percent residential metering initiative and the *Get Water Smart* conservation program. To install the meters, the City of Kelowna partnered with Neptune Water Services. Neptune paid the upfront costs of the meters and the money was later recovered through water rates.

In 2003 Kelowna implemented an inclining block rate structure with an excess use surcharge designed to decrease water use and to increase fee equitability. The first 30 cubic meters cost \$0.23, the next 50 cubic meters cost \$0.304, the next 45 cubic meters costs \$0.46 and consumption in excess of 125 cubic meters costs \$0.92. The metering and pricing initiative was well supported by the community and was paired with a billing education that took place prior to the rate change. To ease the transition to the new volumetric fee system, in 1998, four customized letters were sent to homeowners outlining how water bills would change and provided a list of experts that could help reduce water consumption, enabling homeowners to take quick action.

Learn more about *Thinking Beyond Pipes and Pumps* at [www.poliswaterproject.org](http://www.poliswaterproject.org)



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

## watersustainabilityproject

Kelowna successfully targets high water users. Historically, 20 percent of the population has used 80 percent of residential water. To reach this water guzzling demographic, the *Get Water Smart* program developed an irrigation system assessment program where conservation staff visit homes and help residents fix obvious leaks, set irrigation timers and develop home water conservation strategies. The biggest single user of water in Kelowna is the Parks Department, which accounts for 20 percent of all outdoor water use in the municipality during the irrigation season. The *Get Water Smart* program targeted this high water user with its 2007 Parks Audit and Survey program as part of a council directive to reduce park water use by 15 percent.

The City of Kelowna is currently developing Landscape and Irrigation Standards that will ensure adequate soil for moisture retention, the use of hydrozones and design by certified landscape and irrigation technicians in all new construction. This project aims to address the root of Kelowna's water woes by replacing turf lawns with water sensitive landscaping.

### Sources:

*Get Water Smart Website:* <http://www.getwatersmart.com>

Personal Communication with Neal Klassen, *Get Water Smart Coordinator*, conducted by Jennifer Wong on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2008.

Environment Canada. *Municipal Water and Waste Survey 2004*. Available at: [www.ec.gc.ca/water/mwws/](http://www.ec.gc.ca/water/mwws/). Last accessed on August 13, 2008.