



Water Quality Improvement Project

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SEKID trustees recommend a \$22.3-million Water Quality Improvement Project

South East Kelowna Irrigation District (SEKID) trustees are recommending a water quality solution that meets provincial drinking water standards while responding to ratepayers' demands for safe and clean water for all domestic uses. One of eight options considered by SEKID trustees and staff, the proposed solution provides the most effective and economical response to SEKID's ongoing water quality challenges.

The \$22.3-million Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) would supply treated groundwater (well water) for domestic use through a new "twinning" delivery system, and untreated surface water for agricultural use through the existing distribution network. The higher-density Gallagher's Canyon, McCulloch Road, and Hall Road areas would be serviced during the first phase of the project, while the more rural areas would be connected as the project unfolds over ten years. Fire protection for the higher-density Gallagher's Canyon, McCulloch Road, and Hall Road areas would be provided by the groundwater system, while the rural areas would continue to be protected by the existing surface water system.

"SEKID has been working hard for several years to find the best way to upgrade its domestic water system," says board chair Brian Wright. "We are pleased to recommend a solution that complies with Health Canada's *Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality*, addresses ratepayers' concerns about safety and aesthetics, and meets fire-flow requirements."

ALTERNATIVE APPROVAL PROCESS

The project will proceed if SEKID gets approval from landowners during an Alternative Approval Process being held between September 25th and October 25th. Customers are encouraged to read the newsletter being delivered to their homes the week of September 10th, and then to attend one of three open houses being hosted by the District to further inform ratepayers of the project and associated rate increases. The open houses are being held:

- **Tuesday, September 25th at the East Kelowna Hall from 4-9pm.** Formal presentations will be given at 5pm and 7pm.
- **Monday, October 1st at the Gallagher's Canyon Club House from 2-9pm.** Formal presentations will be given at 3pm, 5pm, and 7pm.
- **Wednesday, October 3rd at the Kelowna & District Fish & Game Club.** Formal presentations will be given at 5pm and 7pm.

Customers who can't attend an open house are welcome to meet with SEKID trustees and staff any time between 10:00am and noon October 9th to 12th. Or they can call 250-861-4200 or email info@sekid.ca.

Customers who own land within SEKID boundaries are entitled to vote on the borrowing bylaw that would be required to undertake the WQIP. **Landowners who support the borrowing bylaw don't have to do anything**, while landowners who oppose borrowing must sign an Elector Response Form and submit the original in person to SEKID (3235 Gully Road) or by mail (PO Box 28064 RPO East Kelowna, Kelowna BC, V1W 4A6) by 4pm October 25th. Forms are available at the open houses, at the SEKID office, and online at www.sekid.ca.

“If less than ten percent of the District’s landowners oppose borrowing, then SEKID will proceed with the borrowing bylaw,” says general manager Toby Pike. “If more than ten percent oppose borrowing, trustees may choose to hold a referendum.”

Pike goes on to say that, “Either way, improvements will still need to be made to ensure water quality standards are met. We encourage everyone to attend an open house to learn more about the recommended option, and to help us make the best decision for the future of our water system.”

INTERIOR HEALTH SUPPORT

Water quality has been a challenge since the SEKID system was built in 1920 to supply water for domestic and agricultural uses. For example, suspended particles of clay and silt (turbidity) present during spring runoff can shield protozoa such as *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium* from chlorine. They can cause serious gastro-intestinal illness, particularly in the very young and very old, and in people who are receiving treatment for diseases such as cancer.

SEKID and all other water suppliers serving more than 500 people are required to meet the *Drinking Water Treatment Objectives (Microbiological) for Surface Water Supplies in BC*. To receive its annual operating permit from Interior Health (IH), SEKID must show that it is working toward meeting these provincial water quality standards and treatment guidelines.

“The proposed strategy is sound,” says IH drinking water officer Rob Birtles. “Going to groundwater that offers adequate supply while ensuring good water quality will greatly reduce health risks.” Birtles goes on to say that, “the development of groundwater resources would reduce or remove the frequent use of water quality advisories and boil water notices which, in turn, would bolster public confidence in SEKID’s water system.”

ESTIMATED RATE INCREASES

To cover construction and operating costs, SEKID would borrow funds and increase domestic and commercial tolls. An additional water quality levy would be introduced to users in the year they come onto the new groundwater system. Financing the project this way would reduce the amount borrowed from \$23.2 million to \$15.3 million, and result in fewer financing costs over the term of the project (the interest saved would be about \$2,000 per domestic unit). The new domestic system would be metered and the tolls and the water quality levy would be billed monthly, while connections not yet on the system would be billed quarterly.

A detailed rate analysis has not yet been conducted, but it is estimated that rates for domestic units could increase about ten percent annually over the course of the ten-year project. For example, the monthly rate for domestic units could increase from the \$38 charged now to about \$72 after seven years. An additional monthly water quality levy of \$42 could also be introduced to users in the year they are scheduled to come onto the new groundwater system. The combined total after seven years could be about \$114 per month.

Ratepayers would continue to pay the annual water tax based on the size of their properties. The current charge for properties one acre or less is \$71.05, and for properties over one acre is \$71.05 multiplied by the number of acres with water rights. Trustees propose an annual two-percent increase in water taxes to keep pace with inflation. The estimated annual tax after seven years would be \$82 for properties one acre or less, and \$82/acre for properties over one acre with water rights.

A property one acre and larger with water rights and a home, after seven years, could pay an estimated monthly toll for the domestic connection (\$72), a monthly water quality levy (\$42), and a water tax of \$82/acre/year.

If borrowing is approved, SEKID will proceed with the borrowing bylaw, get IH sign-off, conduct an environmental impact assessment, get provincial approvals for two new wells, develop an implementation strategy, and then prepare and publicize an RFP for detailed project design.

For more information contact SEKID general manager Toby Pike at 250-861-4200 or pike@sekid.ca.