

Tourism blamed for watershed damage

*by Wayne Moore - Story: 47479
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West Kelowna Council wants answers from the Ministry of Tourism concerning its role in the erosion of the local watershed.

Mayor Doug Findlater recently toured Bald Range Creek Watershed with officials from the Lakeview Irrigation District and Westbank Irrigation District.

"What we saw was really quite amazing, really quite disturbing in fact in terms of the damage done by dirt bikes in that area where they zoom beside the creek then up hills," says Findlater.

"This really concerns me. We really need to engage in this issue."

Findlater says LID ultimately ends up repairing the damage themselves.

He says LID will become a municipal utility within a year and a half and with Interior Health water treatment regulations on the horizon, the cost to ratepayers and taxpayers will be significant.

"There are number of ministries involved in this. Ministry of Forest, Interior Health and the Ministry of Tourism and they are not all on the same page."

Findlater says the Ministry of Tourism is winning because they are encouraging this activity in our watershed.

Councillor Carol Zanon, who spearheaded a resolution asking that all motorized off road vehicles be licensed, says in her experience with the irrigation district, the government has dropped the ball when it comes to water management.

"I do believe it has been entirely dysfunctional in the treatment of water. Water is life and yet the Ministry of Tourism had the authority to create a recreation area," says Zanon.

"It received a lot of grants for that recreational park and there didn't seem to be significant consultation with the people who provide the water for us who live down below."

Zanon complains there is no central ministry responsible for water.

"It's divided amongst many different ministries and they just don't seem to talk to one another. I think we have to be at the forefront of this for our own interests, for the safety and health of the people who live here."

The municipality will write the Ministry of Tourism and document conditions within the watershed.

Council will also invite consultant Don Dobson to address council with his suggestions.

"We should not be paying the freight for any damage done to the watershed and costs that are passed on to our citizens," added Zanon.