



Community Services

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Dear SILGA General Manager:

Email: yoursilga@gmail.com

Re: 2022 SILGA Community Excellence Awards – RDCO Flood Mitigation Planning
Category: Environmental Sustainability

The Regional District of Central Okanagan respectfully submits its Central Okanagan Flood Mitigation Planning project (www.rdco.com/flood) to the 2022 SILGA Community Excellence Awards under the Environmental Sustainability category.

Background:

Located on the traditional territory of the Syilx people on the shores of Okanagan Lake, the Central Okanagan is home to approximately 195,000 residents (2016 census). The Central Okanagan is comprised of six distinct but closely related communities including two unincorporated electoral areas (Central Okanagan West and Central Okanagan East), four member municipalities (Peachland, West Kelowna, Kelowna and Lake Country), and six Indian Reserves (Westbank First Nation and Okanagan Indian Band).

In June of 2016, the RDCO Regional Floodplain Management Plan (RFMP) Phase 1 Report was completed. The RFMP identified high risk areas in a region-wide high-level risk assessment and gap analysis and established the scope and priorities intended to be completed with Phases 2 and 3. Phase 2 included development of flood hazard maps for a number of streams, the shores of Okanagan, Ellison, and Kalamalka/Wood lakes, as well as ongoing risk assessments and dam inundation studies around the region. Phase 3, undertaken as part of this project, seeks to use the information collected through Phases 1 and 2 to develop non-structural flood mitigation strategies; where non-structural describes mitigation activities that do not involve large, engineered structures (e.g., dikes, dams, etc.).

About the Project:

In early 2021, the RDCO embarked on an extensive communications and engagement strategy to gain input from member local governments, Syilx communities in the region, stakeholders, and the public to build a shared understanding of the wicked nature of flood management with a focus on non-structural flood mitigation actions. Throughout this process, the project leadership team with the support of a steering committee, developed a strategic resource guide to assist governments and others to act both individually and collectively to enable non-structural flood mitigation actions. Two broad categories were explored, including:

1) Risk Reduction:

- Land stewardship – maintaining and restoring natural areas (e.g., watersheds, wetlands, riparian areas, natural waterways) to help reduce flooding.
- Land use management - encouraging or requiring types of land use in flood hazard areas that will prevent or reduce potential damage. For example, a green space would be less affected by flooding than a new subdivision.

- Building management - regulations and strategies that make structures and belongings less susceptible to flood damage. For example, using flood-resistant materials for the ground floor of a building.

2) Resilience:

- Education and awareness - homeowner guides, flood and climate change education, neighbourhood preparedness programs, and other learning resources.
- Emergency response - early warning systems, temporary barriers, evacuation route planning, and other flood response programs.
- Insurance and disaster financial assistance - managing financial risks where no other mitigation strategies are available.

Beneficial outcomes of this project:

This project will be integrated with all other flood risk assessment, flood mapping and flood mitigation activities underway in the Central Okanagan and adjoining regional districts. The experiences of 2017 and 2018 have demonstrated that the Central Okanagan is especially vulnerable to flood damage because of the density of population near flood prone creeks and lakeshores.

While much of the work to plan, make decisions, and implement non-structural flood mitigation will be carried out separately by many actors across the region, there are also a suite of actions needed at a regional level to enable and support those distributed actions and to reduce the potential for working at cross-purposes. The Resource Guide offers a number of recommendations that aim to enhance success through a more consistent and coordinated approach at a regional level and offer an excellent opportunity to reduce flood risk and gain valuable co-benefits.

Completion of a flood mitigation resource guide for the region will provide an opportunity and framework for Central Okanagan jurisdictions to consider mitigating and preparing for risks using consistent strategies while continuing to build strong working relationships. We believe that this work, as an example, pilot and template, will be of significant benefit to other communities in the Okanagan Valley and across the BC Interior where there are few examples of comprehensive non-structural flood mitigation planning and where the impacts of floods continue to be an ever-present threat.

The Regional District of Central Okanagan is proud of our region's ongoing accomplishment; the Central Okanagan Flood Mitigation Planning project is a fantastic project to share with SILGA's members.

Sincerely,



Brian Reardon
Chief Administrative Officer

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