

Water policy reform needed

BY LISA GOUDY, LEADER-POST OCTOBER 6, 2011

The climate might be heating up, but Saskatchewan's weather will only get drier and stormier, according to the chair of the United Nations Water for Life initiative in Canada.

Bob Sandford will be speaking about the need for water policy reform in Regina at 7 p.m. tonight at the MacKenzie Art Gallery. The presentation is part of a 16-city national tour.

"What we're finding is that warmer temperatures are causing the global hydrological cycle to be more active," said Sandford. "Therefore, the norms to which we have become used to no longer apply in a lot of cases in a lot of regions."

The result is years with both more frequent, intense droughts and more storms with increased flooding.

Sandford said water policy reform is needed - specifically water conservation measures.

Sandford said he hopes to make water-related concerns political priorities and to encourage the right leadership for a solution.

"We need to start integrating flood and drought prediction and protection mechanisms," he said. "If you're going to start having intense flooding on a more regular basis in Saskatchewan and that's going to be combined with cyclical deep and persistent droughts, the economic cost of this could be huge, so it's very important to give full consideration to how you can minimize those risks by adapting through better water management."

He mentioned the Northern Voices, Northern Waters strategic plan in the Northwest Territories as an example of how such management is feasible.

"I'm not saying that the model in the Northwest Territories is perfectly transferable to Saskatchewan, but it does show that even small jurisdictions with very diverse views and populations can do it. So it does suggest that it can be done," said Sandford.

Other issues concerning Canadians include the lack of awareness of water's importance to daily life and how much people are wasting water in Canada, Sandford said. The average Canadian uses 329 litres of water per day per person, 300-percent more than what other jurisdictions are doing. In the European Union, people use about 140 litres of water per person per day. The figure drops to 100 litres per day in some other locations.

"This suggests that we're paying a huge amount of money to build, maintain, and replace water infrastructure to generate and supply water that's, to a very large extent, wasted," said Sanford. "The infrastructure costs of this are huge and now we're finding out that we can't afford in this country to

maintain that infrastructure."

Sandford added there are unnecessary energy costs to wasting water.

"We can save money, use our water resources more wisely, have more water available for other purposes, including growth in the future - and also we can mitigate climate changes by simply being more strategic, more careful and conserve better the water resources we have."

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