

## STORM WARNING

# Act now on climate change, experts urge

*Sandford, Harford provide advice to East Kootenay residents on how to prepare for changes to our water resources*

**SALLY MACDONALD**  
Townsmen Staff

Two climate change experts were in Cranbrook last week to urge Columbia Basin residents to get informed about the predicted changes to our water resources.

Bob Sandford, the EPCOR Chair of the Canadian Partnership Initiative in support of United Nations "Water for Life" Decade, and Deborah Harford, executive director of Simon Fraser University's Adaptation to Climate Change Team, visited Cranbrook and Kimberley on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to give public lectures at McKim Middle School and the College of the Rockies, also meeting with students in both cities.

The series was sponsored by Citizens for a Livable Cranbrook, Wildsight and the College of the Rockies.

The pair spoke about how predicted climate change will affect our water resources, and what we in the East Kootenay can do to prepare.

"My message for the Kootenays is that what is happening in the rest of Canada and around the world suggests you are in a very positive position with respect to the benefits that will accrue here as a result of managing water more effectively," Sandford told the Townsman.



Deborah Harford

"By decreasing water usage, by being very careful in understanding natural processes and ecosystem needs for water, by understanding the larger dynamics of the Columbia River Treaty, you can position yourself as a region to have a very positive future."

Harford explained the impacts climate change will have here in the East Kootenay.

"You will get warmer, wetter winters with more rain falling as snow on lower elevations, and more heavy precipitation events

that are unpredictable. So you've got more chance of flooding. There will be longer, hotter, drier summers, without the benefit of the snowpack and ice that used to be there at lower elevations running off, so you are more likely to get drought at the end of the summer," she told the Townsman.

"All of those things have implications for everything from civic infrastructure, to farmers and their water allocations, to how we deal with the Columbia River Treaty."

Sandford agreed that reconsidering the Columbia River Treaty is a pivotal opportunity for our region. It gives us the chance to make policy based on the current understanding of ecosystems, an energized hydrological cycle, equity with First Nations, and the fact that climate change could affect surrounding regions differently to how it affects us.

"The reconsideration of the Columbia River Treaty is an opportunity to address all of those things simultaneously so that you might be able to use crafting of new conditions of the treaty as an adaptation strategy for the entire region," said Sandford.

B.C.'s water act has elements that are more than 100 years old, Harford went on.

"It predates climate change, it



Bob Sandford

predates pretty much everything that has ever happened in B.C. We really need to encourage our leaders to keep that on the table," she said, adding that it doesn't contain groundwater protection policies.

"I encourage people to write to their mayors and councillors, to their MLAs and MPs, and to think about this in the provincial election next year," said Harford.

"Find out all about it and then write to the current premier and the opposition and tell them, I want to see this on the table be-

cause we need to protect our water in B.C."

The Columbia Basin is uniquely positioned to make a difference to the province, Sandford pointed out.

"Water act modernization, nesting that in the Columbia River Treaty, and responding to these larger issues is an economic and a social opportunity for the people who live in the Basin and ought to be considered as such," he said.

"In this town, your mayor is a central player in some of those considerations. You have people in your municipal government who have influence on these matters. They would appreciate the best advice they can get and the best understanding of what their constituents want."

Harford echoed the importance of speaking up.

"We really need to let our leaders know that we care about it. Anybody in this region who does care about our water systems would be helping by bringing that up," she said.

"Let local leaders know you want to see these issues considered in policy, and that you are prepared to help and support."

You can learn more about B.C.'s water act at [www.livingwatersmart.ca](http://www.livingwatersmart.ca).