

Watershed Stewards look at residential development in Valley area

By Rod Andrews
Water is fast becoming a major area of concern around the world.

In the Saskatchewan Valley area, the water concerns range from having too little rainfall for crops, to flooding, to strange cloudbursts in the summer and meltwater in the spring.

The impact of residential development in the area has an effect on many aspects of water retention in the area, from how much soils are impacted by development to the flooding due to changes in drainage patterns.

To look at the impact that residential development has on the water cycle of the area, the South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards Inc. held a conference in Osler that attracted municipal leaders and developers looking at their role in water management.

A grassroots, community driven, nonprofit organization, the SSRWSI works in the area to implement programs and initiatives that will protect the limited water resource.

The group's mission is to inspire and empower those living in the South Saskatchewan

River Watershed, urging participation in stewardship initiatives and activities "that will protect the beauty, diversity and integrity of the watershed, while encouraging environmentally sustainable economic and cultural activities".

Their vision is for a future "where the people of our watershed, the councils, which represent them, and the commercial entities, which provide goods and services to them, share a stewardship ethic which ensures the long-term economic and cultural well-being of the watershed through ongoing cooperative efforts in ecological protection and conservation".

They have six major goals to protect and preserve the surface water and ground water within the South Saskatchewan River Watershed, making sure that there is a "safe and adequate supply of potable water".

One of the goals, "to emphasize the overall, including economic, importance and value of preserving the natural environment, particularly with regards to watercourses, aquifers, riparian areas, and wetlands," is where the

conference sprang from, as residential development has been booming in many parts of the Valley area.

A developer, Len Cantin, manager of County Meadow Homesteads, Project O Development Ltd., Osler, told those at the conference that melt and rain water drainage is of major concern to the proposed residential development located south of town.

Cantin said instead of taking the easy and simple approach to drainage, which in their case would see water directed to the South Saskatchewan River, they should be "creative" and "take the challenge" by looking at alternative uses for the water, including "to reuse it to avoid discharges and affecting people downstream".

Storage of water in a "community lake" is being considered for the subdivision project, but there is more to it than just having a pretty lake in a pretty park.

"Why not use the rain (melt) water and treat it for potable water or other alternatives such as for irrigation?" said Cantin.

He said having "excess water" could generate additional



Len Cantin talking about innovative ways to manage water for the Project O Development Ltd., Osler during the South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards conference.

revenue for the town and attract businesses and industries that would not come if there was not the supply in the community.

Cantin said society has the responsibility to look after a dwindling resource so "we should look at how to use it responsibly".

Russ McPherson, land use manager with Waterwolf, spoke about the project that includes the South Saskatchewan River and Diefenbaker Lake to the south, and extends to Warman and the northern part of the RM of Coman Park.

Waterwolf brings municipalities together and the project serves as the hub for regional planning services, geographic information services (GIS), website creation, hosting and management, GPS data gathering and management to improve municipal planning in what McPherson said was an area of 27,640 square kilometres, or "half the size of Nova Scotia".

The project has been a way

of doing business regionally – a planning body, a not for profit business unit attached to the Regional Economic Development Authority and Community Futures office.

It involves 16 rural municipalities and 46 local governments in all, and is quickly becoming a model for regional cooperation, as well as providing a long-term plan for the region.

McPherson said the Lake Diefenbaker-South Saskatchewan River system is the "backbone" of the region and the population base is expected to increase, which will have an impact on the services and the economy of the area.

He said much growth is expected in the area and partnerships of many kinds "will drive future changes" in that area.

McPherson said the biggest change for the river basin area will be the creation of "a city-state".

"Saskatoon is going to be our city-state when it hits a

population of 300,000," which he expects could happen shortly, and will continue to impact the entire watershed area.

He said shared services will be the mandate of the future in the region, and those who will survive in the future will be those who have done long-term planning.

Alan Parkinson, representing SaskWater, said "water is a constraining factor in the development of Saskatchewan" and the government is looking at water conservation and other ways to protect the water resource.

He said partnerships involving water projects will be important, especially in helping to protect the resource.

Parkinson said the government will be investing money over the next four years on surface ground water resource studies, with studies being done that will "be shared with developers in order to help economic development".



Colin Aebig, left, Don Greve and Doug Knoll represented the Town of Rosthern at the South Saskatchewan River Watershed Stewards Inc. conference held in Osler.