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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD ANNUAL MEETING PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON VALLEY-WIDE WATER CONNECTION

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board held its Annual Meeting today at Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna, showcasing its work over the past year and previewing projects for the year ahead.

“The theme we chose this year is ‘One valley. One water.’, explained Board Chair Sue McKortoff. “The water of our valley, from the upper reservoirs, to the streams and lakes that flow through our valley bottom, and the groundwater that goes unseen, is all connected, from Armstrong to Osoyoos. At the same time, we live – and a growing number of people are joining us here – in Canada’s most water-stressed region,” she added. “We have experienced varying degrees of drought and flood. And water, being the source of all life, requires everyone, residents and even visitors, the business community, government and utilities, to be good stewards, helping preserve and protect it. Our Annual Meeting is a celebration of the work done over the past year to meet that challenge, and preview plans for the coming year.”

“Our accomplishments are due in large part to our partnerships,” added Water Board Exec. Dir. Anna Warwick Sears. That collaboration continues to grow, she said, and is reflected in the progress made this year on drought management in our valley, flood planning, determining Environmental Flow Needs (the water needs for fish and the environment) on significant streams in the valley, invasive mussel prevention, and more.

An example of that cooperation was on display at the meeting with a panel discussion, entitled “Behind the scenes at the Emergency Operations Centre.” The panel included presentations by Sandra Follack - City of Kelowna's Deputy Fire Chief and Central Okanagan Emergency Program Coordinator, Todd Cashin - Regional District of Central Okanagan's Community Services Director and Planning Section Chief for Central Okanagan's EOC, and Canadian Forces Capt. Carsten MacLean, BC Dragoons' Adjutant.

“Emergencies in the Okanagan, the types of events that result in the opening of an EOC, have been linked to extremes in precipitation, either flooding or wildfires made worse by extended dry weather” Sears explained. The panel included a discussion about up-to-date flood mapping and other water-related data used to help address these emergencies. “This type of data is important in helping deal with these crises as they unfold, but also in helping our communities develop long-term plans to avert future disasters.”

In reviewing the past year during her own presentation of the Annual Report, Sears noted a common theme with the Water Board's various projects – collaboration with a common goal to ensure the region's resilience. And as the OBWB looks forward to another year, she added the recently announced AquaHacking Challenge as another project with the same goal, inviting and mentoring young tech-savvy youth to tackle some of the Okanagan's most pressing water issues.

“No one knows what the future will bring, but we are working on solutions to help us meet the challenges of today and tomorrow,” said Sears.

The annual meeting included the awarding of the “Make Water Work Community Champions” title, this year to the District of Peachland for collecting the most water conservation pledges per capita. This is Peachland's 2nd win after winning the title in 2016.

Make Water Work is a valley-wide outdoor water conservation initiative of the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise program, created and delivered in partnership with local governments and utilities throughout the valley.

"We are so proud to be the '2019 Make Water Work Community Champions,'" said Peachland Mayor Cindy Fortin. "And although the recognition is wonderful, and the competition is fun, I'm so pleased that the conservation message is getting out there, not just to Peachland residents, but to the whole Okanagan.

"I'd like to thank the OBWB and Okanagan WaterWise for organizing this awareness campaign, and the other communities' Mayors, Council members, staff, businesses and residents for supporting such a worthy cause. Hopefully one day competitions like this won't be necessary and, instead, water conservation will be the norm."

Although Make Water Work has awarded prizes to individual pledgees since 2011, the friendly community-to-community challenge began in 2014. The first Community Champion was Oliver, followed by Armstrong in 2015, Peachland in 2016 and Armstrong again in 2017 and 2018.

The Make Water Work campaign continues until the end of September. The Okanagan Valley is still in Level 2 drought with some South Okanagan creeks facing low stream flows. People are being asked to conserve, ensuring enough water for late-summer/fall crops and returning salmon. Okanagan residents can find outdoor water conservation tips, watering restrictions for their community, the 'Make Water Work Plant Collection,' and pledge for a chance to win WaterWise yard prizes at www.MakeWaterWork.ca.

A copy of the 2019 Annual Report can be found at <http://www.obwb.ca/overview/annual-reports/>.

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