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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MILFOIL OUTBREAK ON OSOYOOS LAKE PROMPTS SPECIAL ATTENTION

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has put its Eurasian Watermilfoil Control Program into high gear at the north end of Osoyoos Lake this summer, looking to get ahead of the weed this season.

“We used to see massive weed beds like this 20 to 30 years ago, but I haven’t seen milfoil growth this early, or to this extent, since that time,” noted Ian Horner who has been with the program for more than 30 years and is the Eurasian Watermilfoil Field Supervisor.

In response to the outbreak, the Water Board has trained an additional operator, with milfoil control experience on Christina Lake, to run the harvester – a type of floating lawn-mower, explained Horner. The control operation is now running seven days a week, he added.

A number of factors came together to cause such an outbreak, Horner said, noting the low lake level this winter, the warm early spring and then heavy rains, which likely washed nutrients into the lake.

In addition, the best method to control milfoil is rototilling, derooting the aquatic plant, in fall and winter, Horner explained. However, Osoyoos Lake has a naturally limited rototilling season based on its water levels, and a smaller window of opportunity than in other parts of the Okanagan Valley. There are also limited sites available to launch the control machines.

“It’s just a weed, but a large part of the Okanagan economy depends on tourism and we like our pristine lakes,” noted Horner, adding the milfoil control team should have the plant under control by summer’s end.

According to Osoyoos Mayor and OBWB chair, Stu Wells, this summer’s milfoil outbreak points to the importance of the Northwest Sewer Project. Residential sewage leeching into groundwater and finding its way into Osoyoos Lake has been a long-standing concern.

“That whole northwest area is moving from septic to sewer thanks to the OBWB, which is helping fund the project over the next 20 years,” noted Wells, adding Phase 1 is almost completed and work towards Phase 2 and 3 is beginning. The project includes six phases and is set to be finished by March 31, 2012.

“When the work is all done, nutrient loading will be vastly improved. Nitrogen and phosphorous levels in the water will be eliminated, which will certainly address our milfoil situation,” added Wells.

Milfoil isn’t the only lake plant in Osoyoos. Operators have also seen brown algae and the native

potamogeton pond weed. However, the OBWB's weed control program only extends to milfoil, Wells noted. In general, native aquatic plants are fish-friendly. Eurasian milfoil, however, is invasive, non-native and a nuisance for swimmers and boaters. Control of the milfoil on public beaches and boating areas are given top priority.

For more information on the Milfoil Control Program and the Okanagan Basin Water Board please visit www.obwb.ca.

Photo opportunities are available.

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