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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **EXCITING TIMES AHEAD AS WATER BOARD CELEBRATES 40 YEARS**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has come a long way since its beginnings 40 years ago. The results of the Water Board’s efforts were showcased today at its Annual General Meeting, held at Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna.

“It was 1970 when the three Okanagan Regional Districts – North, Central and Okanagan-Similkameen – joined together to establish the Okanagan Basin Water Board. They saw the need for a valley-wide approach to a variety of serious water issues,” noted OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears. Starting with the worst problems first, the OBWB began a grant program to improve wastewater treatment and clean up the waters of the Okanagan. It also introduced a program to control non-native, invasive aquatic weeds, but didn’t take on its full mandate for many years.

After significant changes in the valley and a renewed concern for water issues, the Water Board began a Water Management Program in 2006. “A number of very positive initiatives have been created as a result,” added Warwick Sears, pointing to the Water Conservation and Quality Improvement Grant Program, and the creation of the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council – a technical advisory committee to the Water Board. There is also a Water Science component to the program, and Communications and Outreach projects.

“Because of the Water Management Program, this year has been a time of ‘*Growing Partnerships. Bringing Home Results*,’” Warwick Sears said, referring to the title of this year’s annual report. “We have seen important projects completed, such as Phase 2 of the Okanagan Water Supply and Demand Study. This was the result of an unprecedented partnership between federal and provincial ministries, water suppliers, universities, and many others.”

It was this ability to bring partners together that also led to a successful Drought Planning Workshop last summer, an Endocrine Disrupting Compounds Study with UBC-Okanagan, and the start of “Okanagan WaterWise” – a public outreach initiative, aimed at uniting valley residents in water conservation and protection efforts.

And, it was the OBWB’s interest in building strong partnerships that resulted in its Board of Directors agreeing this week to throw its support behind a BC Regional Innovation Chair in Water Resources and Ecosystem Management at UBC-O, contributing a total of \$500,000 over five years towards this research position. It is expected that this support will help leverage an additional \$1.25 million from the province’s Leading Edge Endowment Fund (LEEF), and other major donations. This decision by the OBWB board was based on the unanimous recommendation of support from all three Okanagan regional boards.

The Water Board’s ability to build partnerships and create results was on the mind of Kelowna Mayor Sharon Shepherd as she prepared to address those gathered at the AGM. “It’s a real pleasure to celebrate the Water Board’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary,” she remarked. “Recent news of the board’s support for

the LEEF chair is just one more example of the Water Board’s ability to bring people together and the very important role it has in water management for this valley. The Water Resources Chair is expected to bring additional resources to the table to ensure a healthy, sustainable water supply for Kelowna and the Okanagan as a whole.”

MLA John Slater, B.C.’s Parliamentary Secretary for Water Supply and Allocation, was unable to attend the AGM, but noted prior to the meeting the importance of the OBWB to water management in the Okanagan, and B.C. as a whole. “The Okanagan is leading the province in water management thanks, in many ways, to the Okanagan Basin Water Board,” he said, adding the results of a number of OBWB projects are being adopted in other parts of the province.

“The Government of Canada recognizes the Okanagan as a priority watershed in this country,” added Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan. “We are aware of the problems the valley is facing, but also understand the opportunities that exist to address them. The Okanagan Basin Water Board is a key partner in tackling these issues.

“The Water Board has done great work over the past 40 years, enhancing quality of life for residents of this valley,” Cannan continued. “We look forward to continuing to work together, ensuring a sustainable water system for our children and grandchildren.”

For more information on the Okanagan Basin Water Board, or to view a copy of “*Growing Partnerships. Bringing Home Results.*” please visit [www.obwb.ca](http://www.obwb.ca).

- 30 -

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