



**“Shared water, shared future: bridges to sustainability for Osoyoos Lake”**

**September 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 Osoyoos, B.C.**

May 24, 2011

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **REGISTRATION OPENS ON IMPORTANT OSOYOOS LAKE WATER FORUM**

**Osoyoos, B.C.** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board, together with the Town of Osoyoos, the International Joint Commission and several other partners, is pleased to announce the opening of early registration for an important forum regarding the regulation of water on Osoyoos Lake between Canada and the U.S.

Currently, lake levels on Osoyoos Lake are controlled by the State of Washington through the operation of Zosel Dam in accordance with Operating Orders issued by the International Joint Commission (IJC) and overseen by the commission’s International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control. The Board of Control is made up of U.S. and Canadian representatives. The orders expire in February 2013 – 25 years after the completion of Zosel Dam – and the forum is being held to help gather public input in preparation for the renewal of operating orders. The Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum will be held Sept. 18 to 20 in Osoyoos, B.C.

“For the last 25 years the orders have only related to the control of lake levels. But as we approach a renewal of the orders, for the first time we’re talking about how much water should be required to flow south across the border and putting a guarantee on that,” explains Stu Wells, Osoyoos Mayor and Chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board. “The question then becomes one of ‘Who’s water is it?’ Who has first rights to it? And what happens in a drought?”

These are not easy questions, Wells notes, adding adequate water flows to the U.S. protects fish on the American side of the border but also fish that swim north into Canadian waters.

“These issues are not easy,” agrees Craig Nelson, Okanogan Conservation District’s District Manager. “If they were we wouldn’t need a forum.”

The purpose of the forum is to discuss science related to the lake, including a number of recent studies commissioned by the IJC to help inform their decision on renewing the orders, and to get public feedback. Most of the studies are now available at: [www.ijc.org/conseil\\_board/osoyoos/osoyoos\\_pub.php?language=english](http://www.ijc.org/conseil_board/osoyoos/osoyoos_pub.php?language=english). Studies include an assessment of the most suitable water levels on Osoyoos Lake, and climate change impacts on water levels. Several other topics will be covered at the forum, including water for fish as well as sensitive and endangered species, and water conservation and quality protection efforts on both sides of the border.

“Many people are unaware of the IJC and its role. Yet, what the Commission decides can impact what people can do as individuals,” Nelson explains. “The better informed everyone is, the better the input.”

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For more information on the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum visit [www.obwb.ca/olwsf/](http://www.obwb.ca/olwsf/)



The forum should be of interest to anyone who depends on water. In other words, everyone. This includes people working in agriculture, tourism, fisheries, health care, First Nations, local residents, students, those who operate water utilities, and municipalities.

“It’s important for people to pay attention to the direction this is going,” adds Wells. The last order was issued 25 years ago. This one could be for any number of years, or like other IJC orders it could be permanent. “It could be a long time before you get a chance to speak on this again.”

Early registration opens today, May 24, and ends Aug. 15. Discount registration is available for residents of Oliver, Osoyoos and Oroville. All others should register online at [www.obwb.ca/olwsf](http://www.obwb.ca/olwsf). Fees are \$100 for non-residents for one day and \$175 for all three.

After Aug. 15, fees will be \$100 for one day and \$200 for all three days. Sept. 15 is the last day for online registration and Sept. 16 is the last day for registration at town offices. On-site registration will be available at the Sonora Centre.

Discount registration for local residents is \$25 for one day and \$50 for all three. Oroville residents should contact their local town office, while Oliver and Osoyoos residents should visit the Sonora Centre in Osoyoos to take advantage of this opportunity.

Day 1 is a welcoming reception between 5 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. at Nk.Mip Desert Cultural Centre. Day 2 will be a day of “Sharing Water Science” and will run 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and be held at Osoyoos’ Sonora Centre. The day will include discussion around recent studies on the effects of climate change on Osoyoos Lake, water levels during drought years, fish and species at risk on the lake, and more. There will also be an opportunity for questions from the floor.

Day 3, “Ensuring Sustainability,” will be between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., also at the Sonora Centre and look at milfoil control on both sides of the border, water conservation efforts in Canada’s Okanagan, watershed protection efforts in the U.S. Okanagan, the renewal of operating orders on Osoyoos Lake, and again questions from the floor. For a complete agenda please visit [www.obwb.ca/olwsf](http://www.obwb.ca/olwsf).

Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum partners include: Town of Osoyoos, International Joint Commission, Okanagan Basin Water Board, Environment Canada, US Geological Survey, Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, US Army Corps of Engineers, Okanagan Nation Alliance, Osoyoos Indian Band, Colville Confederated Tribes, B.C. Ministry of Environment, Washington State Department of Ecology, Town of Oliver, Okanagan County Public Utility District, Okanagan Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Lake Osoyoos Association, and the Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society.

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