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OKANAGAN WATER BOARD CELEBRATES WORK IN WATER PROTECTION AND RECEIVES FUNDS TO CONTINUE

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) held its Annual General Meeting today at the Laurel Packinghouse in Kelowna. The meeting touched on the accomplishments of the past year in protecting Okanagan water, and looked ahead at the work to come.

“It’s been a fantastic year,” said Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director for the OBWB. Reflecting on the past year, she noted the work done to bring diverse groups of people and organizations together for a common purpose, to help ensure a clean, sustainable water supply for all Okanagan residents, now and in the future.

Last fall’s Rain to Resource workshop is one example of this collaboration. It brought together elected officials, local government planners and engineers, policy-makers and others, from across B.C., to learn about new and innovative ways to address stormwater. And now, the OBWB is in the process of producing a homeowner’s guide to managing stormwater, encouraging residents to also be involved in water protection.

“This type of collaboration will become even more important as the Okanagan, like most regions, faces the added pressures on their water supply from climate change and population growth,” added Warwick Sears. “The OBWB is pleased to take a leadership role in meeting these challenges.”

And now, the OBWB has received a nod from the federal government with funding to support additional projects. Ruta Fluxgold, Manager of the Ecosystem Coordination Office for Environment Canada’s Pacific region, announced funding of nearly \$77,000 to the Water Board at the AGM to support Okanagan water initiatives. Some \$20,000 will go towards supporting the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum (Sept. 18 to 20 in Osoyoos), \$15,479 will support water utility staff get trained in the use of the OBWB’s Streamlined Water Use Reporting Tool (SWURT web-tool). Another \$15,480 will assist the OBWB with its hydrometric monitoring program, reintroducing monitors to track water supplies, and \$26,000 will be provided to the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program to help develop a biodiversity strategy for the Okanagan.

“The Okanagan is recognized as a unique ecosystem in Canada which could face serious water shortages,” explained Warwick Sears. “We’re really happy to be partners with Environment Canada on these very important projects. This funding commitment helps us move forward on projects that have significance locally and provincially, helping us protect the water supply and ecosystems of the Okanagan.”

Another OBWB partner, Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA), gave a presentation at the meeting on the amazing recovery of the Okanagan sockeye fishery. Howie Wright is Project Manager with ONA’s Fisheries Department. As a result of a number of changes to the natural habitat of the fish in the Okanagan, Wright explained, the salmon experienced a serious decline in numbers. Now, as a result of significant restoration work, ONA is seeing fantastic returns.

“Since 2008, we’ve been able to increase the amount of fish Okanagan Nation members have been able to harvest for food. In 2010 we were even able to open a recreational fishery and even a small Okanagan Nation commercial fishery,” said a pleased Wright. “It’s taken awhile, but through collaborative efforts and multiple projects we’re seeing the benefits.”

It’s a project that pleases Warwick Sears. The fish are an important part of the Okanagan ecosystem, she said, adding “the work of the ONA, and the return of the salmon to our waters, is integral to the health of the entire water basin.”

For more information on the Okanagan Basin Water Board, or to view a copy of the Water Board’s 2011 Annual Report, “Providing Leadership in Changing Times,” please visit www.obwb.ca.

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