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**OKANAGAN WETLANDS BENEFIT FROM FUNDS
AND STRONG PARTNERSHIPS**

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) held a joint news conference today at Fascieux Creek Wetland in Kelowna, welcoming new funding from Environment Canada towards Phase 2 of the Okanagan Wetlands Strategy project and some significant additional work by the ONA.

While Phase 1 involved public outreach, data collection, prioritization, and mapping of Okanagan wetlands, Phase 2 includes two years of hands-on wetland restoration and rehabilitation. The goal is to complete six projects (three by March 31, 2015, and another three by March 31, 2016). In support of this effort, a total of \$50,000 was granted to the OBWB for project management over two years, and another \$50,000 was provided to ONA for hands-on wetland projects – both ONA-specific wetland projects, plus projects with the OBWB. These hands-on projects include important work by ONA to support the Western Painted Turtle on the Penticton Indian Reserve near Penticton airport.

“Okanagan wetlands provide enormous benefits to people by protecting against floods, improving water quality and water supply, controlling erosion and supporting a host of recreational activities,” noted Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan in announcing funding. “That is why I am proud to announce that our Conservative Government is working with our community partners in taking action to conserve Okanagan wetlands and, where impacted, enhance or restore these valuable ecological resources.

“Together, we will continue to find new ways to work together to protect our lands, waters, and wildlife,” added Cannan.

“The Okanagan People have a strong relationship with the water,” said Penticton Indian Band Chief Jonathan Kruger, speaking for the Okanagan Nation. “Protecting and enhancing wetlands is vital to maintaining that relationship. This project is part of the larger water strategy for the Nation and it is through partnerships like this, and collaboration that we will continue to move forward to ensure there is water for tomorrow.”

“Wetlands, once considered a nuisance and a waste of valuable land, are an important part of our community,” stressed OBWB Chair Doug Findlater, noting the importance of the wetland strategy. Today, more than 85% of the Okanagan's wetlands & natural riparian areas are gone, and remaining areas are at risk of loss, making the need for work in these areas all the more important, he added.

“Thanks to funding from Environment Canada, we are pleased to announce the hiring of Jillian Tamblyn as the OBWB's Okanagan Wetlands Strategy Project Manager. Over the next two years, Jillian will be working with the ONA, plus many more partners to see these projects through, helping create communities that are more resilient to flooding, and pleasant to live in.”

According to Tamblyn, Phase 2 recently kicked off with a fencing project at McLachlan Lake, helping protect a wetland holding only a small amount of water and in need of protection from cattle and off-road vehicles.

In addition to the OBWB and ONA, partners in Phase 2 include the Regional District of Central Okanagan, BC Wildlife Federation, South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program, Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program, Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society , and B.C. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. This partnership will grow as more groups join in hands-on work (e.g. Fish and Games Clubs, etc.)

Phase 3 will involve the development of a comprehensive Okanagan Wetland Strategy document for future work, informed by the previous phases.

For more information, please visit www.obwb.ca/wetlands.

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