

September 3, 2015

NEWS RELEASE

WATER BOARD CELEBRATES 45 YEARS OF WATER PROTECTION & LOOKS AHEAD AT FUTURE CHALLENGES

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) holds its Annual Meeting on Friday, Sept. 4 and while the agency is celebrating 45 years of water protection in the valley, it is already looking at the challenges ahead and ways to meet them.

This free event includes: a special keynote address from Julia Lew with the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) regarding her agency's efforts to fight back invasive quagga mussels; a drought update from the Province; the release of this year's OBWB Annual Report "It starts with water" and, of course, birthday cake. The meeting, to be held at Rotary Centre for the Arts, begins at 8:30 a.m. with a sign-in and continues to 12 noon. The agenda can be found at www.obwb.ca/?p=8863.

"It really does all start with water," notes Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director for the OBWB. "It's central to everything – our health, our tourism, our food security, and our economy. We've seen incredible improvements to water quality over the last 45 years, and even conservation improvements, but the threats to our water supply are still there and multiplying.

"This year alone, we've had so much coming at us, invasive milfoil growth like we've never seen, a Level 4 drought which is forecast to be an issue next summer as well, and of course the threat of invasive mussels continues to be a concern. But the strength of the Water Board, and its success in addressing water issues, is in its consistent approach to building partnerships," added Sears.

Those partnerships will be visible at the meeting. Attendees include local and senior government staff and electeds (mayors, MLAs and MPs), agencies represented on the OBWB's Water Stewardship Council (the technical advisory body to the board) including First Nations, farmers, realtors, local government planners, water stewardship groups, and others. But the gathering is also intended to build even more partnerships and learn from others as a way to help address local water issues.

As such, Lew was invited to share the experience of the SNWA in addressing invasive mussels. The OBWB began raising the alarm about zebra and quagga mussels in 2012 after a research paper indicated an infestation would cost the Okanagan at least \$43 mill. a year. The Water Board began pushing the province and federal government for inspections along the B.C.-Alberta and Canada-U.S. border, but also launched its own Don't Move A Mussel campaign (www.DontMoveAMussel.ca) to raise awareness and help prevent the spread.

According to Lew, a Pilot Plant Specialist in the agency's Applied Water Quality Research Dept., SNWA provides drinking water to almost 2 mill. residents and another 40 mill. annual visitors. In 2007, the presence of quagga mussels were confirmed in their water source, Lake Mead, and have been causing problems ever since. The main issues from a water delivery perspective, she says, have been the clogging of water intakes and protection of water treatment infrastructure.

In many cases, utilities will use chlorine as an effective decontamination method, but this isn't possible at SNWA where the chemical, when combined with existing organics, would create a carcinogenic byproduct. In response, the authority conducted its own research to find a safe and effective treatment. "The biology is very unpredictable with these mussels," explained Lew.

“Whereas we haven’t seen some of the effects other jurisdictions have with the mussels, we’ve had others not seen elsewhere,” she said. For example, in many areas where the mussels exist there is one reproductive cycle per year and one female can produce a million eggs. But the warm water temperatures in Lake Mead is resulting in six to eight reproductive cycles per year.

Another issue is the cost to chemically pre-treat a new in-take, made necessary because of declining water levels in the lake. The cost will be about \$8 mill., said Lew.

In looking at the Okanagan’s situation, where as far as we know the mussels are not present, Lew provides a caution.

“If we could go back in time, prevention would have been the way to go. I know some think prevention is costly, but the moment you don’t have it, and the mussels get in, it’s devastating. The costs once they arrive are far worse.”

In considering the work of the Water Board over the last 45 years, Sears noted the Water Board has much to celebrate. Its Sewage Facilities Assistance Grants to local governments in the valley, which began four decades ago, have greatly improved water quality. The Water Conservation and Quality Improvement Grants Program, almost 10 years old, has provided \$3.2-mill. in funding to projects that improve our waters. In the past year alone the OBWB has worked with partners on wetland rehabilitation, helping prepare the Okanagan for the impacts of climate change, it has seen the expansion of its water conservation effort (www.MakeWaterWork.ca) with a new low-water plant collection, and much more.

But we also face challenges, added Sears. Partnerships, learning from agencies like SNWA, and working with others will continue to be important.

“The only way we can adapt to the changes in weather, population, invasive species, is to work in partnership, with the Water Board providing a consistent way to bring people together in the best interests of the valley. There is no more efficient or effective way to do it,” Sears concluded.

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NOTE TO MEDIA: As in previous years, we will be providing opportunities for media to interview the various speakers at our AGM. Photo opportunities will also be available. A full agenda is attached.

WHAT:	Okanagan Basin Water Board – 2015 Annual Meeting “It starts with water”
WHO:	Doug Findlater , Chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) Peter Waardenburg , Okanagan Nation Alliance Julia Lew , Southern Nevada Water Authority Ray Crampton , B.C. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Anna Warwick Sears , Executive Director of the OBWB
WHERE:	Rotary Centre for the Arts, 421 Cawston Ave., Kelowna, B.C.
WHEN:	Friday, September 4, 2015, 8:30 a.m. to 12 noon

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2015 OBWB ANNUAL MEETING & 45th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

"It starts with water"

DATE: Friday, September 4, 2015
TIME: 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM
LOCATION: Rotary Centre for the Arts, 421 Cawston Ave., Kelowna, B.C.

8:30 AM	Registration and Light Refreshments	
9:00	Welcome and Introductions	OBWB Chair Doug Findlater
9:10	Welcome from Okanagan Nation Alliance	OBWB Director Peter Waardenburg
9:20	Keynote address: The Southern Nevada Water Authority's Quagga Mussel Experience – Impacts and Adaptations	Julia Lew – Southern Nevada Water Authority, Water Treatment Pilot Plant Specialist
9:50	Audience Q & A	
10:05	Coffee Break	
10:25	Provincial Update on Drought	Ray Crampton – FLNR Resource Management, Acting Regional Executive Director
10:35	Presentation of Annual Report "It Starts With Water"	OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears
11:10	Audience Q & A	
11:25	Presentation of "Make Water Work Champion" award	OBWB Communications Director Corinne Jackson
11:40	OBWB Anniversary cake cutting, photos, networking	
12 PM	Adjourn	OBWB Chair Doug Findlater

Keynote speaker:

Julia Lew will present on the ways the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) in Las Vegas is responding to invasive quagga mussels. The infested waters of Lake Mead are one of their main water supplies. She recently completed a comprehensive report on mussel impacts and responses, drawing from the experience of all departments. Julia's primary work is in the Applied Water Quality Research Division, leading development, operation and maintenance of special pilot projects on new water treatments – including treatments for managing quagga mussels in the SNWA's infrastructure.

Julia is a certified Water Treatment Plant Operator with over 20 years of work experience, specializing in treatment plant optimization. **This will be a fascinating ring-side account of what may be required in the Okanagan in case of an invasion, and additional motivation for preventing zebra and quagga mussels in our valley.**