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NEWS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL WATER FORUM RETURNS TO OSOYOOS - DROUGHT, MUSSELS, CLIMATE AT TOP OF AGENDA

Kelowna, B.C. – With a drought still gripping parts of B.C. and Washington, concerns over the possibility of a costly mussel invasion, and more, community members and agencies on both sides of the border are coming together to talk. The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB), the Town of Osoyoos and the International Joint Commission (IJC) are organizing the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum, Oct. 7-9, at the Sonora Centre in Osoyoos, B.C. This is the third such forum, with previous events held in 2007 and 2011.

“The drought, invasive species, making sure there is enough water for fish, are key issues we need to coordinate on with Washington State,” notes OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears. “These three issues alone represent millions of dollars for our economies.

“This is a really important gathering,” Sears added, saying that although the meeting is in Osoyoos, it relates to the entire Okanagan watershed from Armstrong to the Columbia River, since the waters are all connected. “We rarely have a chance to talk with our counterparts in the U.S. and this is an opportunity to meet with senior decision makers, and also hear from First Nations and grassroots – residents, farmers and business people – from both sides of the border.

“It’s about building relationships, and having a shared understanding of problems so when a crisis hits you can work through them effectively,” said Sears. “With climate change and population growth, the management of water is going to be critical. We will sink or swim based on the strength of our relationships.”

Osoyoos Mayor Sue McKortoff agrees, pointing to the lake that defines her community and straddles the Canada-U.S. border. “We must look after our lake. It is the lifeblood of our community and we have to be vigilant in protecting it.”

Reviewing the topics at the forum, including toxic blue-green algae blooms which have been an issue in Osoyoos Lake in the past, McKortoff noted that she will be attending as the mayor, but also as a concerned citizen. Hearing from those who are leading research on these topics will certainly help as a decision maker, both at her council table and as an OBWB Board Director, and as a resident.

“The drought this year has had everyone sit up and take notice about not using water indiscriminately,” she said. Also, the recent presentation on invasive zebra and quagga mussels at the OBWB’s Annual Meeting was a wake-up call, added McKortoff. “We all have to start looking at water differently.”

Among those attending will be U.S. IJC Commissioner Rich Moy of Helena, Montana. “The last science forum was an outstanding opportunity to learn about the valley, the people who live there and the critical water management issues,” he said. “I’m looking forward to receiving updates on a number of topics, particularly the

For more information on the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum visit www.obwb.ca/olwsf



cooperative management of water flows for salmon, how this is affected by drought and other water supply trends, and the potential role of climate change.”

“We have all the hot-button issues facing our shared waters pulled together into one event,” noted Sears, “Drought, climate change, effects of forest fires on water, blue-green algae, invasive mussels and milfoil, water for fish, and more. They are science-related issues but the event and the information is definitely geared to a public audience,” she added. Indeed, Moy also hopes for strong participation by residents on both sides of the border. A registration discount is being offered as incentive to residents of Oliver, Osoyoos and Oroville.

“These are issues that affect every single person who plays in and drinks from our lakes,” Sears concluded.

Day 1, Oct. 7, begins with an evening Welcoming Reception hosted at Nk’Mip Desert Cultural Centre, followed by two days of presentations and discussions.

The theme for Day 2, Oct. 8 is “Sharing Water Science“ and will include specialists, scientists, local government representatives and others presenting on topics such as climate variation, water supply, fisheries recovery, water quality, and more.

Day 3, Oct. 9, will look at “Ensuring Sustainability“ and include presentations on drought and conservation, local actions, living on the lake, invasive species, and more.

For more information and to register, go to: www.obwb.ca/olwsf.

Also of note, the OBWB is pleased to sponsor a one day “Columbia River Treaty: Past, Present and Future” workshop set for Oct. 7 at the Sonora Centre in Osoyoos. With the treaty up for renegotiation, and the Okanagan being a sub-basin of the Columbia, the workshop will include a review of the treaty’s history and purpose and discussion of future implications. The Okanagan is outside the historical treaty area, but many impacts have been felt here. Presenters include Canada’s chief negotiator Kathy Eichenberger; Jay Johnson, the legal counsel for the Okanagan Nation Alliance; Barbara Cosens, law professor at the University of Idaho with the U.S. perspective, and Robert Sandford, water expert with the United Nations University in Hamilton, Ontario. Details at: www.crtworkshop.ca.

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