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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WORLD-RENOWNED WATER CHAMPION COMES TO OKANAGAN TO CELEBRATE UN WORLD WATER DAY

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board’s Okanagan WaterWise program has teamed up with the Okanagan Institute for Biodiversity, Resilience, and Ecosystem Services (BRAES-UBC Okanagan) to bring back its popular and free panel discussion and mixer on March 22, UN World Water Day, at the Laurel Packinghouse in Kelowna.

This year’s event, “*exSTREAMS: The Okanagan water story and you*” looks at the valley’s droughts and floods both from a historical First Nation’s perspective, as well as how these extreme weather events are changing in frequency and intensity. It will look at how Okanagan communities are working together to address droughts and floods, and how individuals can be part of that effort. Special this year, will be a keynote address from internationally-celebrated water champion Margaret Catley-Carlson, providing an international perspective.

Catley-Carlson is past Chair of the UN-affiliated Global Water Partnership and current Vice Chair for the Canadian Water Network Board. She also holds many other distinctions, including being an Officer of the Order of Canada in recognition of her extensive contributions to public service. This service includes remarkable contributions to international water issues both as a Canadian diplomat and as a humanitarian.

“We often hear ‘Think globally. Act locally.’ UN World Water Day is when people, across this blue planet, are reminded to think about water and all the ways it sustains our lives,” noted OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears. “Last year we saw the effects of drought. In recent years, we’ve also experienced high water. This annual event is our way of inviting people in, to learn more about water issues that affect the Okanagan, to inspire them to protect water here at home, and understand the connections between Okanagan water and what’s happening around the world.”

“We’re thrilled to have Margaret come to the Okanagan and share her insights, and real-life solutions to water issues, collected from her years of work in various locations around the world,” added BRAES Director Lael Parrott.

Looking at this year’s topic, Parrott added, “The Okanagan is known for its beautiful big lakes, but this has contributed to a myth of abundance. The truth is, we live in a place where water is not abundant and what we do on the landscape is changing the availability of water. Removing natural land cover increases the impacts of flooding and drought, but protecting and restoring this land cover can help protect us from these weather extremes.”

Following the keynote address will be the annual panel discussion. Panelists include:

- **Sarah Alexis**, Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) – Natural Resources Project Coordinator & **Richard Bussanich**, ONA Fisheries Biologist – speaking on the history of water in the Okanagan, changes in the landscape and its impacts, efforts to restore and the importance of traditional knowledge in that work;

- **Anna Warwick Sears**, *Okanagan Basin Water Board - Executive Director* – sharing on drought, including last summer’s extreme ‘Level 4’ drought in the Okanagan and what’s being done to make communities more resilient;
- **Don Dobson**, *member (past-chair) of the OBWB’s Water Stewardship Council, representing Assoc. of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC* – sharing on his nearly 45 years as a professional engineer in flood protection efforts, what he’s seeing and how communities are preparing; and
- **Margaret Catley-Carlson**, *Vice Chair Canadian Water Network Board* – providing an international and national perspective on water issues and how the Okanagan has a place within that.

In addition to the discussion, several staffed display tables will be set up, providing residents information – and goodies – to help build a strong resilient Okanagan community, in their yards and in their neighbourhood – from low-water landscapes to improved home irrigation and more. Those with tables include:

- BRAES
- OBWB-Okanagan WaterWise
- ONA
- Okanagan Xeriscape Association
- City of Kelowna
- Mission Creek Restoration Initiative

Doors open at 5:30pm, event starts at 6pm. Light refreshments will also be served.

This event is free but **seating is limited** and **pre-registration is required**. Visit www.OkWaterWise.ca for more information. Register at: <http://exstreams.eventbrite.ca/>.

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MEDIA CONTACT: Corinne Jackson, OBWB – Communications Director
 Office: 250-469-6271
 Mobile: 250-718-7249
 E-mail: Corinne.Jackson@obwb.ca