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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN'S FUTURE WATER NEEDS TO BE STUDIED THANKS TO FEDERAL FUNDING

Kelowna, B.C. – A lot has changed in the Okanagan since 2010 and since the last major study of the valley's water supply and demand was completed. As one of Canada's fastest growing regions, our population has boomed. We've weathered droughts and flooding, and last year we experienced both. Thanks to \$392,500 through the Federal Gas Tax – B.C. Strategic Priorities Fund, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) will complete major update of that study.

The Federal Gas Tax Fund is provided twice-a-year to provinces and territories and is intended to address three objectives: productivity and economic growth, a clean environment, and strong cities and communities. In B.C., the program is administered by the Union of BC Municipalities.

"We're very pleased to receive this funding," said Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB's Executive Director, adding that the grant will allow for the study of streamflows in up to 27 of the principle tributaries that enter the Okanagan's major valley bottom (mainstem) lakes and river systems. Streams that will be studied include Vernon and Whiteman Creeks in the North Okanagan, Mission and Mill Creeks in the Central Okanagan, Trout and Shuttleworth Creeks in the South Okanagan, and others.

"With all the uncertainty we've seen with historic flooding, and extreme drought with low flows in streams, it's more important than ever to have the best science to estimate streamflow. Local planners and water managers simply cannot rely on historic water patterns and ranges to manage supply any longer. We need to identify the shifts in supply – in snowpack, in rainfall, and reservoir storage – and consider these in flood and drought plans, resource development plans and infrastructure plans," added Sears. "There have been a lot of technological advances and improvements in streamflow estimating science since the last time we did these studies. It's time to update our understanding of what is happening with water in our valley."

The data will be made available to local governments, Okanagan First Nations and utilities, helping them make water management and future planning decisions to meet the needs of all, including fish, agriculture, and human consumption. It will also be provided to the province to help with water licensing decisions.

The streamflow study is expected to begin in spring 2018 and wrap up by the end of 2019.

"Improvements to local infrastructure are so important. They make our communities even better places to live," said Selina Robinson, B.C. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. "We are pleased to partner with local governments and the federal government to improve the daily lives of British Columbians."

Dir. Wendy Booth, UBCM President, spoke to the importance of this funding. "Communities across B.C. are looking for funding to replace, upgrade and expand local infrastructure," she added. "The federal Gas Tax Fund is accelerating the pace of infrastructure renewal through the transfer of close to \$3 billion since 2005 for projects in our province. I appreciate the Government of Canada's long-term commitment to fund priorities identified by B.C. local governments."

For more information about additional funding announced in this current round of Gas Tax funding, visit <https://news.gov.bc.ca/16553>.

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