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OKANAGAN CELEBRATES CANADA WATER WEEK WITH FILMS, KIDS CONTEST, PANEL, PRIZES & MORE

Kelowna, B.C. – There’s something for everyone as the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its outreach program Okanagan WaterWise prepares to celebrate UN World Water Day and Canada Water Week, March 16 to 22. The theme this year: wetlands! There is a screening of several wetland documentaries, a guided wetland tour, the ever-popular – and free – public panel discussion, and a contest for kids with prizes including boat cruises!

“There’s a lot of great – and important – work being done around wetlands in the Okanagan. We wanted to share that with the community and celebrate it. What better time than Canada Water Week,” explained OBWB Chair Doug Findlater. “During the last few decades, as the Okanagan’s population has swelled, more than 85% of our wetlands and natural riparian areas have disappeared. Today, we understand the importance of wetlands,” he added, noting their ability to absorb storm water to prevent flooding and filter pollutants. “They’re also home to a diverse ecosystem with many rare and endangered plant and animal species. And then, of course, they’re beautiful places to visit.”

The fun begins on Monday, March 16 when the OBWB launches its annual **Okanagan WaterWise Challenge** on Monday, March 16 with the theme “Get Wild about Wetlands!” School classes and individuals throughout the Okanagan, from Kindergarten to Grade 12, are invited to explore an Okanagan wetland and report back, submitting a multi-media entry that explains what they saw, why the wetland they visited is special, and what people can do to protect these cherished places.

“This is our fifth year holding the contest and each year we’ve been amazed at the projects submitted by young people, telling us why it’s important to them that we protect our water,” said OBWB Communications Director Corinne Jackson, who manages the WaterWise program. “We’ve had short films, music videos, cartoon strips, posters and more,” she added.

Prizes include a 2-hour boat cruise on Okanagan Lake for a private class lesson on Okanagan water, presented by the Okanagan Science Centre, as well as pizza parties and pool passes. For contest details visit www.OkWaterWise.ca. Contest ends April 24.

And on Wednesday, March 18, organizers have scheduled a line-up of free events including a series of **wetland documentaries** to be screened between 1 p.m. and 3:50 p.m. at the Laurel Packinghouse in Kelowna, followed by a **guided tour of Rotary Marshes** from 4 to 5 p.m., and finally the very popular **panel discussion** and meet & greet from 6 to 8 p.m., again at the Laurel Packinghouse.

“We’re very happy to have CBC Daybreak South host Chris Walker as panel MC this year, leading a fun and informative discussion on ‘Wetlands...not wastelands!’” added Jackson.

Panelists include:

- **Anna Warwick Sears**, *Okanagan Basin Water Board - Executive Director*, talking about the growing importance of wetlands worldwide and in the Okanagan
- **Lael Parrott**, *Okanagan Institute for Biodiversity, Resilience, and Ecosystem Services (BRAES) – Director*, on research regarding the economic value of wetlands
- **Grant Furness**, *B.C. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural resource Operations – Ecosystems Section Head*, speaking on wetlands from a provincial perspective
- **Jillian Tamblyn**, *OBWB Okanagan Wetlands Strategy - Contract Project Manager*, regarding efforts to restore and protect Okanagan wetlands
- **Todd Cashin**, *City of Kelowna – Sustainability Coordinator*, on local government wetland efforts
- **Bryn White**, *South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program – Program Manager*, providing the perspective of a non-profit working for several years on Okanagan wetland projects

Information tables will be set up by a number of agencies working with wetlands. Light refreshments will also be served.

The panel event, and the film screenings are free but **seating is limited and pre-registration is required.** Visit www.OkWaterWise.ca for more information.

Special thanks to this year's partners in the Okanagan WaterWise Challenge, including Vernon Aquatic Centre, the YMCA of Kelowna's H2O Adventure and Fitness Centre, the City of Penticton Community Centre Pool, Okanagan Science Center, Cruise Okanagan, The Executive Boardroom, and School District's 83, 22, 23, 67 and 53. Thank you also to Adam Patterson of Ecoscape Environmental Consultants for leading our wetland tour.

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