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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **OKANAGAN PROJECT FUNDING HELPS ADDRESS FUTURE WATER NEEDS AS CLIMATE CHANGES**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – Today, funding was announced to allow the Okanagan Basin Water Board to develop policy that will help address water needs in the region as we see further climate change, population growth and other factors which impact water supply.

The OBWB will receive \$298,000 from Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) over three years, matched by \$331,850 in cash and in-kind contributions through the OBWB and various BC agencies.

“The Okanagan valley has among the highest drought risk in Canada, with some of the fastest population growth, and an economy that is heavily dependent on water for agriculture, tourism and retirement industries,” explained Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB Executive Director. “Despite the known risks, very little work has been done to ensure the reliability of supplies for the future – until now.”

Between 2007 and 2009, the federal government invested heavily in Phase 2 of the Okanagan Water Supply & Demand (OWS&D) Project, with more than \$1.1 million in cash contributions towards the \$2.5 million budget total. The goal of Phase 2 was to provide an up-to-date scientific assessment of current water availability in the Okanagan Basin, and how it will be impacted by population growth and climate change in the near future. Phase 2 will be completed and launched in March 2010.

“After three years of intense study of water issues in the Okanagan, we are getting a handle on what climate change and population growth will bring,” said Warwick Sears. “We’re thrilled with this funding. It will take us to the next step – finding solutions to address these issues.”

Four levels of government, as well as industry and stakeholder groups, have been involved in the OWS&D Project. These include: the Okanagan Basin Water Board, the B.C. Ministry of Environment, UBC-Okanagan, NRCan, Environment Canada, Agriculture and Agrifood Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Okanagan Nation Alliance, and other provincial ministries and educational institutions.

Phase 3 will use the Phase 2 science to modernize water policy in the Okanagan, and communicate facts about water to the public and elected leaders. Phase 3 will also make the data and models available for valley-wide regional and local government planning.

Phase 3 funding is coming from the Regional Adaptation Collaboratives (RAC) initiative of NRCan. The objective of the BC RAC is to “improve the resilience of British Columbians to a changing climate and related impacts on water and aquatic ecosystems by advancing adaptation decision-making in the areas of water allocation and use, forest management, flood protection and community planning. B.C.’s emphasis is on mainstreaming adaptation within a variety of existing planning and decision-making processes commonly used in B.C.”

“We are very pleased to be part of this work, ensuring a sustainable future for all British Columbians,” said Warwick Sears.

For more information on the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its programs, please visit [www.obwb.ca](http://www.obwb.ca) or call Warwick Sears at 250-469-6251.

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Media Contact: Corinne Jackson  
Communications and Research Coordinator  
Office: 250.469.6271  
Mobile: 250.718.7249