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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **GROUNDBREAKING OKANAGAN WATER STUDY SHOWS NEED FOR CONSERVATION AND ADAPTATION**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – After three years of intense study, the Okanagan Basin Water Board and B.C. Ministry of Environment unveiled the results of their long-awaited Okanagan Water Supply and Demand Study on Friday, March 26, 2010.

The project provides a comprehensive look at water availability in the Okanagan Valley. Most importantly, it provides a glimpse of how our water supply will be affected by climate change, explained Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director of the OBWB.

“For the last three years, the OBWB and its partners have been conducting studies on urban and agriculture water use, groundwater, and stream flows. When you stand back and look at the results, ultimately they point to the need for conservation,” said Warwick Sears.

“The reason for this is a merging of some important distinctions in the Okanagan. First, it is a very dry place. Second, we have less fresh water available per person in the Okanagan Basin than anywhere else in Canada. And yet, the average Okanagan resident uses more than two times as much water as the average Canadian.”

Water shortages have already occurred in some areas of the basin and are expected to occur more widely and frequently in the future, noted Warwick Sears, adding that the Okanagan Supply and Demand Study shows that this will present significant challenges as our population grows, and as we see the effects of climate change.

As part of Phase 2 of the study, a comprehensive web-based search tool that allows people to view Okanagan water supplies with dynamic graphs, maps and images was also previewed. The tool allows the user to view the outcomes of scenarios that will impact future water supply and demand, such as population growth and climate change.

Stu Wells, chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, is excited about the web-tool and the possibilities it creates for planning sustainable communities.

“It is the first tool of its kind in Canada and will help decision makers understand current supply, demand, and future water availability to help them plan accordingly,” said Wells. “It’s fantastic.”

MLA John Slater, B.C.’s Parliamentary Secretary for Water Supply and Allocation, was also on hand for the announcement. “I’m thrilled to see this unveiled. As past chair of the OBWB I saw the importance of this work for the Okanagan. As Parliamentary Secretary on water for the province I appreciate the value of this work for all British Columbians.”

With Phase 2 of the OWS&D study wrapping up, the OBWB, and the provincial and federal governments now have their sights set on the start of Phase 3 – using this information to help plan for the future by focusing on policy and planning tools for adaptation to climate change.

With that, Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan announced additional funding of \$442,800 from the Government of Canada for the B.C. Regional Adaptation Collaborative (RAC), which includes \$201,300 for the OBWB initiative.

“The goal of the Government of Canada’s B.C. Regional Adaptation Collaborative is to support local and regional groups, like the Okanagan Basin Water Board, as they develop coordinated climate change action plans,” said Cannan. “Today’s additional funding will help ensure that important work continues.”

These funds will support improvement of the web-tool’s climate change models and development of additional climate change scenarios. It will also assist local governments access customized information for their communities. Finally, it will support a stormwater workshop featuring new approaches to protect water supplies for planners and policy makers.

These latest funds are in addition to the \$298,000 that Natural Resources Canada awarded the OBWB as part of a BC RAC funding announcement in January 2010.

“After three years, it’s great to finally see some outcomes,” added Warwick Sears. “We know that the water of the Okanagan basin is at risk. Now the work begins to determine what we can all do to protect this valuable resource – from residents being conscious about their water use, to local governments planning for its future.”

For more information on the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its programs, please visit [www.obwb.ca](http://www.obwb.ca).

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