

May 13, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WEB VIDEO PROJECT AIMS TO FURTHER DISCUSSION ON EMERGING WATER ISSUES

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board is looking to increase the dialogue on important and contemporary local water issues with a unique pilot project.

Starting today, the Water Board began videotaping presentations made to its technical advisory committee, the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council. The “Water in the Okanagan Basin” video series will then be posted to the board’s website, www.obwb.ca, this summer, explained Nelson Jatel, Water Stewardship Director for the OBWB.

“The Stewardship Council meets monthly and often has experts come in and talk on emerging water issues of significance to the Okanagan. By posting these multi-media presentations to our website, we are creating a library of stories told by experts, sharing this information more widely, and encouraging a broader discussion,” added Jatel.

“The Okanagan is the perfect storm, with its naturally scarce water supply, and with increasing demand and decreasing supply as a result of climate change and population growth. One question the council is trying to address is how to apply best practices, from throughout North America, to support water management in the Okanagan,” Jatel said.

The pilot project kicked off today with the taping of presentations from Dr. John Janmaat (UBC Okanagan), Dr. Ron Griffin (University of Texas), and Dr. Henning Bjornlund (University of Lethbridge). All three speakers volunteered their time to come and speak.

Janmaat, an Assistant Professor of Economics, focused on how a severe, valley-wide water shortage would play out under the current “First in Time, First in Right” water license system. Currently, under FITFIR, water allocation is determined by who, historically, received their license first and how much water they are licensed to receive.

“This is important for the Okanagan because it provides a picture of what could happen and where the pressure points may be,” explained Janmaat. “It is also timely. The BC government is currently asking for input to update its almost century-old Water Act. If we don’t like the implications of FITFIR, we may want to ensure the updated act leads to an allocation system that better meets our goals,” added Janmaat.

Griffin, a water resource economist, spoke on general water marketing principles relating to the exchange of water rights and on some of the experiences in Texas with this policy approach to water scarcity. Bjornlund also spoke on water economics, having researched and provided policy recommendations in Alberta on modernizing its water allocation system, balancing future economic development with the protection of ecosystems.

According to Jatel, future presentation topics being considered include climate change impacts on water, endocrine disruptors (including estrogen compounds) in Okanagan water supplies, and how do we manage competing interests, especially in times of scarcity.

“One of the key roles of the Water Board is to support local governments in the Okanagan valley address inter-jurisdictional issues around water management. Sharing information provided by speakers – who can provide practical solutions – is one more way we can do that.”

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is responsible for water management throughout the Okanagan Basin – from Armstrong in the north to Osoyoos in the south. Its board is made up of three directors from each of the Okanagan regional districts (North Okanagan, Central Okanagan and Okanagan-Similkameen), as well as one representative each from Okanagan Nation Alliance and the Water Supply Association of BC, and the chair of the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council (OWSC).

The OWSC is a technical advisory committee to the OBWB Board of Directors and is made up of representatives from 27 agencies, including water providers, Agriculture Canada, Environment Canada, BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, BC Ministry of Environment, Interior Health, the BC Agriculture Council, BC Cattlemen’s Association, BC Fruit Growers Association, BC Ground Water Association, Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society, Shuswap Okanagan Forestry Association and others.

For more information on the Okanagan Basin Water Board, the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council, and its programs, please visit www.obwb.ca.

-30-

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