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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **PROVINCIAL FUNDS HELP DEVELOP VALLEY-WIDE DROUGHT PLAN FOR OKANAGAN**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is pleased to announce funding from the Province of B.C. to assist in the development of a basin-wide co-ordinated drought plan for the Okanagan.

The OBWB has received \$10,000, the maximum available through the Local Government Grants Act, towards the project. The funds will provide a match to \$70,000 that was announced in March by the Government of Canada through its Regional Adaptation Collaborative (RAC) program.

Given the talk this year about drought, OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears noted that, “This is not about doing crisis management, but putting a plan in place for the future. Our recent dry winter points out the importance of developing a plan,” she said.

The fact is, the Okanagan Valley is a semi-arid desert and has one of the lowest water availabilities per person in Canada. In addition, it has some of the fastest population growth in the country. All of this puts pressure on our water supply.

The Drought Plan will draw on information from the Water Board’s recently announced Okanagan Water Supply and Demand Study to develop drought trigger levels, based on mainstem lake levels, which municipalities and other water utilities can use to respond to region-wide water shortages.

The first step in developing a drought plan, said Warwick Sears, is to determine how Okanagan communities, from Armstrong to Osoyoos, are connected, considering the source and direction of water flows, and then to look at what lake levels would be appropriate for triggering a drought response given the water needs of the environment and downstream communities.

Currently, water allocation in B.C. is determined using a system known as First-in-Time First-in-Right (FITFIR). Under this system, water allocation is determined by who, historically, received their licence first and how much water they are entitled to.

It’s important we understand what the obligation is to supply water to senior licensees and how this would play out if there was a multi-year drought, noted Warwick Sears. For example, there are a number of large senior licenses in Osoyoos, but it is the community farthest downstream.

“Under FITFIR, if Osoyoos was unable to receive the water it is legally entitled to it could request upstream license-holders to let the water flow south,” she explained.

Okanagan residents have seen what happens when there isn’t enough water, for example in 2003 with Trout Creek in Summerland. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans was trying to protect

water levels on the creek for the fish, but the community was wrestling with the ability to meet agricultural and residential needs. Eventually, a water-sharing agreement was reached between all the stakeholders and stands as a leading example of how communities can work together to manage water during times of scarcity.

A made-in-the-Okanagan, valley-wide drought plan would look at the implications of FITFIR and devise a plan that best meets the environmental, health and economic needs of all Okanagan communities.

“We are very pleased to have the province join the federal and local government at the table. It is recognition of the importance of a basin-wide drought plan that will help ensure the long-term prosperity of the entire valley,” added Warwick Sears.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board provides valley-wide leadership on water management throughout the Okanagan, bridging the interests of the three Okanagan regional districts (North Okanagan, Central Okanagan and Okanagan-Similkameen).

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

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