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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WATER BOARD UNVEILS TOOL TO HELP ENSURE SUSTAINABLE WATER SUPPLY

West Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board unveiled its Streamlined Water Use Reporting Tool to the public Feb. 4 at the Holiday Inn in West Kelowna.

“We’re extremely pleased to be here today, launching this important – made-in-the-Okanagan – web-based tool,” said Dr. Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director for the Water Board (OBWB). “SWURT will help our water utilities keep an ongoing record of how much water we are using. This is critical for managing our water supplies and preparing for the shortages that are expected with a growing population and climate change. We’re also very pleased to know that this tool will likely be adopted by the rest of the province in the months ahead, helping ensure a sustainable water supply for all British Columbians.”

In speaking to the need for SWURT, Warwick Sears noted that, the average Okanagan resident uses two times more water than the average Canadian. “We also know that we live in a dry climate and have less water available per person in the Okanagan than just about anywhere in Canada,” she said. “Each of us needs to do a better job of conserving water – and being *WaterWise*. SWURT will help utilities do their part to plan their water use wisely.”

“In the past, water-use reporting required water utilities to fill out a form once a year and submit it to the province,” explained Bob Hrasko, Vice-Chair of the Water Supply Association of B.C. and Black Mountain Irrigation District’s (BMID) Administrator.

In addition, utilities would be asked for repeat requests for information from different provincial ministries. “The process wasn’t efficient, the information wasn’t timely, and it did not help us manage our regional water resources. This tool is a significant step forward,” added Hrasko, whose irrigation district was one of several large Okanagan water utilities instrumental in SWURT’s development.

“The SWURT tool will allow utilities to provide current water use data and access historic data for trending,” Hrasko said. “And just as importantly, we’ll be able to see what other water utilities in the valley are extracting, helping us work together and manage our common water resource. Over time this inventory of information will also help us understand the Okanagan’s changing hydrology. This is very worthwhile and I hope the province continues to invest in this tool and eventually implement it province-wide.”

Speaking on behalf of Stephanie Cadieux, B.C. Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development, Kelowna-Lake Country MLA Norm Letnick noted the important role partnerships played in SWURT’s development.

“We need to work across regions, across ministries and across governments to ensure that we achieve our shared vision for sustainable communities. This project is a great example of what we can accomplish when we work together toward a common goal,” explained Letnick.

“We are pleased to partner with the OBWB and our other provincial and federal colleagues in the development of the Streamlined Water Use Reporting Tool,” added B.C. Environment Minister Murray Coell. “SWURT is a first step towards meeting B.C.’s Living Water Smart commitment that all large water suppliers provide accurate reporting of water use. We look forward to the successful implementation of this tool in the Okanagan and its potential use across the rest of the province in the future.”

“Once again, the OBWB is showing leadership in addressing our water issues,” Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan said. “Water is vital to our existence. Managing this valuable resource efficiently and in a sustainable manner will allow the Okanagan to grow, improving the lives of the people in our communities. I am pleased that the Government of Canada, through the Canada-BC Building Canada Fund and Environment Canada, is supporting this important initiative.”

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STREAMLINED WATER USE REPORTING TOOL BACKGROUND:

- SWURT was developed in response to the Water Board's recent Water Supply Demand (WSD) Study which found that the Okanagan needed a better tool for tracking water use.
- SWURT was developed by the OBWB with input from:
 - more than 25 Okanagan water utilities
 - B.C. Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development
 - B.C. Ministry of Environment
 - B.C. Ministry of Health Services
 - Spot Solutions (contractor)
- SWURT funding was provided by:
 - Building Canada Fund (BCF) \$153,846
 - Environment Canada \$18,100
 - Okanagan Basin Water Board \$77,154
 - **Project total: \$249,100**

FEATURES:

- SWURT is a user-friendly online computer software program designed for large volume water users within the Okanagan watershed to report their monthly water use.
- Developed in partnership between the province and OBWB, SWURT is a pilot, designed to be applied across B.C. to support data collection, licensing and management of water resources.
- The online water management tool allows water suppliers to enter information about their water systems submitting monthly water levels – a much more efficient and transparent way to submit, share and store water use data.
- A water management dashboard featured in SWURT, provides water managers the ability to compare at a glance water utility information with neighbouring water suppliers.

BENEFITS:

- SWURT improves efficiency for water users and government agencies by standardizing data collection, organizing the information, and providing it back in a useable format.
- The information is made accessible to senior government departments – reducing the redundant reporting requests made to local water utilities by different departments.
- SWURT was designed with the input of water suppliers and BC government ministries to enable increased transparency and improved coordination of data to save time and money for local water utilities and the province.
- Okanagan water utilities will benefit from this water management tool by improving their knowledge of their own water use patterns and, for the first time, be able to compare to neighbouring users.

- Public benefits include: improved drought management planning, improved management of water supplies, increased efficiency and better information.
- The Okanagan shares one water. The SWURT initiative promotes better communication between different levels of government, among water utilities, and supports improved water management throughout the Okanagan.