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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HISTORIC TALKS ON B.C./WASHINGTON STATE WATER RELATIONS GETS UNDERWAY

Kelowna, B.C. –With the opening reception of the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum behind them, politicians, scientists, policy wonks, and concerned citizens, from both sides of the Canada/U.S. border, are ready for two days of intense talks on the issues facing our shared water, and how to ensure a clean, sustainable water supply into the future.

“We’ve gotten past the introductions and the political handshakes, and now we’re heading into the real science today and tomorrow, dealing with the present and future health of Osoyoos Lake and all the waters connected to it,” explained Osoyoos Mayor and Okanagan Basin Water Board Chair Stu Wells. “It’s important that we all have a sound knowledge of the threats to our water – the lifeblood of our communities.”

Wells joined with Osoyoos Indian Band Chief Clarence Louie, and City of Oroville Coun. Walt Hart III in welcoming delegates Sunday evening at the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre in Osoyoos. For the next two days, Sept. 19 and 20, talks will be held at the Sonora Centre in Osoyoos.

One of the most important issues up for discussion is the International Joint Commission’s (IJC) expected renewal of Operating Orders on Osoyoos Lake, which expire in February 2013. Currently, an agreement between Canada and the U.S. regulates lake levels on Osoyoos Lake for drought and flooding, and to ensure enough water reaches Zosel Dam in Washington State. The agreement is up for renewal and there has been discussion about expanding the order to include guaranteed flow rates. The OBWB has suggested more study is needed before such approval is given, considering the real potential for drought in the Okanagan. Delegates over the next two days include: Washington State Sen. Bob Morton - 7th District, Kettle Falls; Member of Parliament (MP) – B.C. Southern Interior Alex Atamanenko, Member of the B.C. Legislative Assembly (MLA) – Boundary-Similkameen John Slater, and several members of the IJC.

Other issues up for discussion include milfoil control (chemical versus mechanical), protection of water for fish, and the impacts of climate change and population growth on our shared water supply.

“Water isn’t discussed day-to-day at the council table. We only talk about it when there’s a problem with what’s coming out of the tap,” added Oroville city councilor Walt Hart III. “But in the long run, water is going to be the major issue facing us in the future.”

For more information on the Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum visit www.obwb.ca/olwsf/



For Hart, this forum is an opportunity to learn about potential solutions to address Oroville's, and Washington state's, water issues. "I'm concerned about Osoyoos Lake water levels and the ability to meet the needs south of the border. As more and more water gets used in the North, it affects the amount getting to us," said Hart. "I'm looking forward to hearing the experts discuss what concerns we may be facing with our supply, being able to ask questions, and making contacts so I know who to talk to in the future as issues arise."

"Any time you have the top scientists from Canada and the U.S. coming together to share their knowledge, it's very positive," added Wells. "Recently, we've had a difference of opinion in milfoil control on both sides of the border. And then there's the renewal of Operating Orders. Are we going to consider climate change, drought and guaranteed flows in this next agreement? These types of conferences can help us understand each party's concerns and help come to an understanding. This is a very positive event."

For more information, please see backgrounder below. Also, visit www.obwb.ca/olwsf/.

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BACKGROUNDER

The renewal of Operating Orders on Osoyoos Lake

Currently, an agreement between Canada and the U.S. regulates lake levels on Osoyoos Lake.

The levels are controlled by the State of Washington through the operation of Zosel Dam and overseen by the International Joint Commission's (IJC) "International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control." The Board of Control is made up of U.S. and Canadian representatives. The Operating Orders for Osoyoos Lake expire in February 2013 – 25 years after the completion of Zosel Dam.

There has been discussion about the possibility of guaranteed flow rates with the renewal of Osoyoos Lake Operating Orders. The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) has suggested more study is needed before such approval is given, considering climate change and the real potential for drought in the Okanagan.

B.C.'s Okanagan is recognized as a unique and vulnerable ecosystem. It is home to Canada's only desert (Osoyoos, B.C.) and there is less water available per person than almost anywhere in Canada. At the same time, Washington is faced with aquifers going dry and the need for increased water supplies.

While the last Operating Order was for 25 years, the new order could be for another 25 years. Or, like other IJC orders in effect between Canada and the U.S., it could be indefinite.

This forum is an opportunity for the public to learn more and provide input before a new deal is signed in 2013.

The Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum

The first forum of this kind was held in 2007, bringing together politicians, scientists and residents to learn more about shared water issues between our two countries, specifically connected to Osoyoos Lake and the waters connected to the lake.

The 2011 forum is presented by the OBWB, the Town of Osoyoos, the IJC, and several other partners.

Event sponsors include: Environment Canada, OBWB, Town of Osoyoos, the IJC, Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, Washington State Department of Ecology, Osoyoos Indian Band Development Corporation, City of Oroville, B.C. Ministry of Forest Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Watermark Beach Resort, Destination Osoyoos, True Engineering, Osoyoos Credit Union, US Geological Survey, Prince's Oroville, Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society.

Event partners include many of the above, as well as Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, US Army Corps of Engineers, Okanagan Nation Alliance, Colville Confederated Tribes, B.C. Ministry of Environment, Washington State Department of Ecology, Town of Oliver, Okanogan County Public Utility District, Okanogan Conservation District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Lake Osoyoos Association.

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