

February 3, 2012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WATER BOARD TO MONITOR VULNERABLE OKANAGAN GROUNDWATER

Kelowna, B.C. – Local residents, along with federal, provincial and local dignitaries, were on hand today as the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) broke ground on an important project to monitor the health of groundwater supplies in Joe Rich.

The project is part of the OBWB's Groundwater Monitoring Project, drilling wells in a number of Okanagan aquifers that have been identified as vulnerable and in need of monitoring due to limited water supply and increasing demand. The wells are being drilled in partnership with B.C. Ministry of Environment, B.C. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Environment Canada and various Okanagan local governments. The Joe Rich well is being drilled in partnership with the Regional District of Central Okanagan.

"Groundwater is one of the biggest unknowns in this valley," said Dr. Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director for the OBWB. Groundwater is an important supply of water to many residents in this valley, but because its extraction is currently unlicensed in B.C., we don't have an accurate measure of how much is being drawn out, she explained. At the same time, recent research indicates there are a number of sensitive aquifers in our valley.

The Joe Rich monitoring well is being drilled in one of 15 Okanagan aquifers identified as sensitive. A number of monitoring wells have already been drilled with two on Anarchist Mountain (outside of Osoyoos), two in Oliver, two in Twin Lakes (near Keremeos), and one in Spallumcheen. Others are proposed in Ellison, Summerland, West Kelowna, Penticton and in an aquifer on UBC Okanagan lands.

These monitoring wells will help communities protect, manage and sustain their groundwater supplies, and help them in land-use planning decisions that could affect these aquifers.

"The water of this valley is all connected," noted Warwick Sears, "from the water that flows down our mountains into the creeks, rivers and lakes in the valley bottom, to the water in our underground aquifers that also ends up in our lakes. Monitoring these important water sources is good for Joe Rich and the other communities that have them installed, but also good for the entire valley. Knowing where and how much water we have will help ensure a sustainable supply."

"Gaining a clear understanding of local groundwater is critical to the Okanagan Basin, where the availability of water is an ongoing challenge," added B.C. Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Steve Thomson. "The Government of British Columbia is proud to be a partner in the Okanagan Groundwater Monitoring Well Project, providing in-kind contributions, including automated

water level monitoring equipment, ongoing maintenance, and facilitating siting access on Crown lands. Together, we are helping local communities better plan for their water needs now and in the future.”

“Groundwater is vital to our water supply, and managing this valuable resource in an efficient and sustainable manner is necessary,” agreed Kelowna-Lake Country MP Ron Cannan. “The Okanagan Basin Water Board is leading the way by providing tools that help us to get serious about our own water usage and determine what each of us can do to protect this valuable resource for the benefit of all in our communities.”

Joe Rich resident and RDCO Central Okanagan East Electoral Area Director Patty Hanson was also on hand for the drilling. “In our rural area of acreages, most residents rely on wells for a steady water supply to meet their daily needs,” she said. “Drilling wells into this bedrock aquifer can be a hit and miss prospect for water. The data gathered from this monitoring well will provide a better picture of the underground water resources available. It’ll also help us plan for the future so that we can ensure sustainability of this precious commodity. Our area is pleased to make a contribution to see this project happen.”

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