

July 18, 2012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CANADA & U.S. TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARINGS ON INTERNATIONAL OSOYOOS LAKE AGREEMENT

Kelowna, B.C. – Public hearings are being held on the renewal of Operating Orders for Osoyoos Lake July 24 in Oroville Wash., and July 25 in Osoyoos, B.C. And elected officials on both sides of the border are encouraging residents to come out and have their say.

The International Joint Commission (IJC) is holding the hearings as the current orders are set to expire Feb. 22, 2013. Currently, an agreement between Canada and the U.S. regulates water levels on Osoyoos Lake to protect against both drought and flooding for the benefit of agriculture, tourism, municipal interests, and fisheries protection on both sides of the border.

It's been 25 years since we had such hearings and these could be the last we ever have. Most of the IJC's water treaty agreements along the 49th parallel are indefinite and it is possible that the one adopted this time around will also be indefinite. This point is not lost on either Osoyoos Mayor and Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) Chair Stu Wells or Oroville City Councilor Walt Hart III.

"A 25-year agreement is not the standard," noted Wells. "I strongly encourage people to come to this meeting and have their voice heard."

Added Hart, "It's very important, especially if we're looking at new Operating Orders that have no date for renegotiation and renewal." For his part, Hart is hoping that the new agreement is not indefinite, adding that it's not easy to foresee future water issues.

The public hearings are a follow-up to last September's Osoyoos Lake Water Science Forum. The forum brought together IJC, federal, provincial/state and locally-elected officials on both sides of the border, as well as water stakeholders, residents and others to hear the latest scientific research on how best to manage our shared water supply. It was also an opportunity for informal comments, said Wells. "These public hearings, however, are an opportunity to have your comments entered into the public record and will help form the basis of a new agreement.

"The Okanagan Basin Water Board went on record at the forum and in follow-up correspondence to the IJC that it had strong concerns about guaranteeing flow amounts – something that was being recommended by Washington State University," added Wells. "In the recently released recommendations from the IJC's own Osoyoos Lake Board of Control it does not recommend guaranteed flows, but this is not a time to be complacent."

Hart believes the discussion over flows is not over, adding he thinks it will still be raised at the public hearings. Participation in next week's meetings is a way to make sure that all sides are heard, added the Oroville councilor.

"Water is an issue for everyone. We all need it and depend on it," Hart noted. "As our population grows and as we see drought and flooding becoming a greater concern in Canada and the U.S., we need to go

into this recognizing that this next agreement must meet the needs of everyone on both sides of the border for years to come.”

PUBLIC HEARING INFORMATION:

July 24, 2012
7:00 PM
Oroville High School
Commons
1008 Ironwood St
Oroville, WA

July 25, 2012
7:00 PM
Best Western Plus Sunrise Inn
5506 Main Street
Osoyoos, BC

Recommendations from the International Osoyoos Lake Board of Control and draft wording on a renewed Operating Order are available for review and comment. Both documents are posted on the IJC website at: www.ijc.org.

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Corinne Jackson, OBWB – Communications Director
Office: 250-469-6271 Mobile: 250-718-7249
E-mail: Corinne.Jackson@obwb.ca