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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF FUNDING WATER PROTECTION – OPENS GRANT CALL FOR 2016

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board is celebrating 10 years of water funding in the valley through its Water Conservation and Quality Improvement (WCQI) Grant Program. To mark the occasion, the agency held a day-long showcase “Celebrating Collective Impact” today at the Westbank Lions Community Centre and announced its call for applications for 2016.

“Today we are celebrating the collective impact that this funding has had in the Okanagan over the last 10 years. And when you see the work that has been done, it’s fantastic,” said OBWB Chair Doug Findlater. “The grant program was started in 2006 as a way to build collaborative approaches to address water issues in our region and develop best practices. Looking at the results of these efforts on display today, you can see the valley-wide benefits of this program.”

In all, the OBWB has awarded \$3.2 million to 197 projects. The groups behind these efforts, in turn, delivered projects worth more than \$20 million to our valley – projects that have helped conserve and protect water in Canada’s most water-stressed region. Projects include stream restoration work for fish, flood mitigation, and improved ecosystems, xeriscape demonstration gardens, water metering, foreshore inventory mapping, drinking water protection efforts like cattle-fencing, and much more.

The event, presented by the Water Board in partnership with the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program and the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program, included shining a light on past and ongoing projects. Additional funders, including the Real Estate Foundation of BC, RBC Blue Water Project and the National Wetland Conservation Fund were also invited to discuss possible partnerships - bringing additional project dollars into the valley. And, the event served as an opportunity for the Water Board to announce the call for WCQI applications for 2016.

There is \$300,000 available for projects that conserve water or improve its quality, noted Operations and Grants Manager James Littlely. Eligible recipients include non-profit community groups, local governments (regional districts or municipalities), and irrigation or improvement districts. Successful applicants can receive up to \$30,000 for their project. The grants are distributed according to the percentage of tax each region pays into the program. This year there will be \$56,820 to the North Okanagan, \$180,660 to the Central Okanagan, and \$62,520 to the South Okanagan.

“This year the board is calling for projects that focus on **drought planning, groundwater studies and water flow monitoring** which should assist water managers better understand the state of our water supplies and adapt to extreme events like floods and droughts. Such projects should also help plan for regulatory changes with B.C.’s new Water Sustainability Act,” said Littlely.

“We all saw how bad the drought was across the province last summer,” he added. “Going forward, the board wants to ensure it plays a positive roll, helping develop proper resources to assist Okanagan communities in becoming resilient in the face of extreme weather events.”

Other project categories considered for priority funding will be discussed by the Board of Directors at their December 1st meeting and posted to the [grants page](#) on the OBWB website. Even with the increased focus on specific types of projects, the Water Board will consider all eligible applications. The complete program guide and application forms can be found at www.obwb.ca/wcqi.

This year’s application deadline is 4 p.m. Friday, February 12, 2016.

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