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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**WARM SPRING, EARLY FIRE SEASON, PROMPTS OKANAGAN  
MAYORS TO GATHER & URGE WATER CONSERVATION**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – On the heels of last summer’s extreme drought, and with the possibility of another one this summer, valley mayors gathered this morning to challenge each other and their residents to conserve water in what is known as Canada’s most water-stressed region. It was all part of the launch of the Okanagan’s annual valley-wide outdoor water conservation campaign “Make Water Work.”

Make Water Work<sup>1</sup> is an initiative of the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)’s Okanagan WaterWise program, developed and delivered in partnership with local governments and utilities throughout the valley.

“We had a healthy high elevation snowpack this winter, but we also had an early warm spring which caused much of it to melt quickly,” noted Okanagan Basin Water Board Chair and West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater. “At the same time, fire season has come early in Western Canada and we’ve had enough experience with devastating fires in the Okanagan to know we can’t waste our water.”

“If we don’t get our spring rains, we could end up in the same situation we were in last year, where the province orders utilities and residents to cut back on water use in an effort to meet socio-economic and environmental needs,” added Findlater.

“Last year’s experience with drought – and previous drought years – has shown us the importance of working together in the Okanagan on water conservation efforts, where the water is all connected. As the Mayor of West Kelowna I’m proud to personally take the Make Water Work Challenge – doing my part to get the most out of the water I use and conserve, starting with making sure to water plants, not pavement. And, I challenge residents to also conserve, saving water for what matters most – food crops, fish and firefighting.”

Mayors and their representatives from throughout the Okanagan then joined Findlater and took the challenge, throwing it out to their fellow residents to do the same. Although the conservation message is a serious one, the community that gathers the most pledges per capita is also named Make Water Work Champion. This was not lost on last year’s winner, the City of Armstrong.

“The City of Armstrong was very proud to have been named last year’s Make Water Work Champion,” said that city’s mayor, Chris Pieper. “The challenge was well-received by our residents who saw that they had a role in helping conserve water, especially during last summer’s drought.”

“I think the awareness generated through the Make Water Work program has really helped bring attention to the value of water in our valley and right here at home, in Armstrong. We intend to defend our title this year and issue a challenge to Peachland to meet the standard we’ve set,” he added with a chuckle.

In addition to mayors taking and issuing challenges at today’s event, OBWB’s Communications Director Corinne Jackson announced the expansion of the Make Water Work Plant Collection, just in time for spring

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<sup>1</sup> Make Water Work was first launched in 2011, with local government and water utility partners throughout the Okanagan, aimed at tackling outdoor residential water use in summer. The valley has less water available per person than anywhere in Canada but has some of the highest use in the country. And, 24% of all water used in the Okanagan is used on household lawns and gardens with a lot of it wasted. Since 2011, there has been an effort to raise awareness, provide tips to make water work more effectively, and a contest to challenge people to “Take the Pledge” online at [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca) and be entered to win a WaterWise upgrade to their yard. Now, with the launch of the plant collection, residents are being offered a tangible way to make a difference every time they choose to purchase plants for their yard.

gardening. The collection, premiered last year, is a project co-developed by Okanagan WaterWise, the Okanagan Xeriscape Association, and Bylands Nursery to encourage low-water landscapes.

“This year the collection has been expanded to include 54 plants, including beautiful grasses, perennials, shrubs and trees, perfect for the dry Okanagan climate,” explained Jackson. “As well, two new garden centres have joined the program, bringing the total to nine, ensuring nearly all Okanagan residents can walk into a garden centre in their community and find the Make Water Work collection, making it easier than ever to find WaterWise choices for their yard.”

Also, as in past years, those who take the challenge and pledge to Make Water Work will be entered to win several prizes including a Grand Prize of a WaterWise yard upgrade worth \$6,000, thanks to contest partners KelownaGardens.com, ProSource Irrigation, Bylands and, Eco Turf Farms.

Residents can take the challenge, find the Make Water Work Plant Collection and water restrictions for their community, by visiting [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca).

Those joining Findlater and Pieper in taking the challenge today included: Vernon Acting Mayor Juliette Cunningham, Acting Mayor for Lake Country Rob Geier, City of Kelowna Deputy Mayor Gail Given, Peachland Mayor Cindy Fortin, Summerland Acting Mayor Toni Boot, Penticton Mayor Andrew Jakubeit, Oliver Mayor Ron Hovanes and Osoyoos Deputy Mayor CJ Rhodes.

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) was established in 1970 as a collaboration of the three Okanagan regional districts – North, Central and Okanagan-Similkameen. The board provides leadership for sustainable water management by protecting and enhancing the quality of life and environment in the Okanagan Basin, from Armstrong to Osoyoos.