

Okanagan Basin Water Board celebrates World Water Day



By Penticton Western News

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board is going all out to mark United Nations World Water Day this week.

Working with the Okanagan Institute for Biodiversity, Resilience, and Ecosystem Services, they've invited internationally celebrated water champion Margaret Catley-Carlson to give the keynote address at a panel discussion and mixer on March 22 at the Laurel Packinghouse in Kelowna.

This year's event, exSTREAMS: The Okanagan water story and you looks at the valley's droughts and floods both from a historical First Nation's perspective, as well as how these extreme weather events are changing in frequency and intensity. It will look at how Okanagan communities are working together to address droughts and floods, and how individuals can be part of that effort.

"The Okanagan is known for its beautiful big lakes, but this has contributed to a myth of abundance. The truth is, we live in a place where water is not abundant and what we do on the landscape is changing the availability of water," said BRAES director Lael Parrott.

"Removing natural land cover increases the impacts of flooding and drought, but protecting and restoring this land cover can help protect us from these weather extremes."

In addition to Catley-Carlson, speakers include Sarah Alexis, natural resources project coordinator for the Okanagan Nation Alliance and Richard Bussanich, ONA Fisheries Biologist speaking on the history of water in the Okanagan, efforts to restore and the importance of traditional knowledge in that work; Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of the OBWB talking about drought, including last summer's extreme Level 4 drought in the Okanagan and what's being done to make communities more resilient and Don Dobson, representing Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of B.C. and sharing nearly 45 years as a professional engineer in flood protection efforts, what he's seeing and how communities are preparing.

Catley-Carlson, a past Chair of the UN-affiliated Global Water Partnership and current Vice Chair for the Canadian Water Network Board, will provide an international and national perspective on water issues and how the Okanagan has a place within that. Catley-Carlson is also an Officer of the Order of Canada in recognition of her extensive contributions to public service, including contributions to international water issues both as a Canadian diplomat and as a humanitarian.

"We often hear 'Think globally. Act locally.' UN World Water Day is when people, across this blue planet, are reminded to think about water and all the ways it sustains our lives," said Warwick Sears. "Last year we saw the effects of drought. In recent years, we've also experienced high water. This annual event is our way of inviting people in, to learn more about water issues that affect the Okanagan, to inspire them to protect water here at home, and understand the connections between Okanagan water and what's happening around the world."

World Water Day has been celebrated annually since it was implemented by the UN in 1993. This year, the theme is water and jobs, recognizing that almost half the world's workers, 1.5 billion people, work in water related sectors and nearly all jobs depend on water and those that ensure its safe delivery.

In addition to the discussion, several staffed display tables will be set up, providing information — and goodies — to help build a resilient Okanagan community, in their yards and in their neighbourhood, From low-water landscapes to improved home irrigation and more. Tables include BRAES, Okanagan WaterWise, the ONA, Okanagan Xeriscape Association and the Mission Creek Restoration Initiative.

Doors open at 5:30 p.m., event starts at 6 p.m. This event is free but seating is limited and pre-registration is required. Visit www.OkWaterWise.ca for more information or register at exstreams.eventbrite.ca.

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