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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**OKANAGAN MAYORS TRADE GAVEL FOR GARDENING GLOVES  
& ENCOURAGE WATER CONSERVATION**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – As Okanagan communities deal with flooding and record-breaking temperatures, and as talk turns to the possibility of another drought this year, the valley's mayors gathered today at the UnH2O Gardens to talk water conservation. The gathering comes as the Okanagan Basin Water Board's Okanagan WaterWise program, and Okanagan municipalities and water utilities, launch their annual residential outdoor water campaign "Make Water Work."

"It can be hard to focus on being WaterWise and water conservation when there's flooding, but it's a priority for all of our communities to use water wisely," insisted Armstrong Mayor Chris Pieper. "Look at last year. Flooding was quickly followed by fire and drought. Water is a valuable resource and we can't take it for granted. We have to respect it."

Pieper was joined by Vernon Mayor Akbal Mund, West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater, and Peachland Mayor Cindy Fortin, as well as Deputy Mayor Blair Ireland of Lake Country, Deputy Mayor for Kelowna and OBWB Chair Tracy Gray, Deputy Mayor Janet Peake of Summerland and Deputy Mayor Mike Compol of Osoyoos. The mayors pledged to Make Water Work this summer more effectively and efficiently and challenged their residents to go to the [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca) website and pledge to do the same.

By pledging, residents are entered to win \$500 WaterWise yard prizes, including plant material from the [Make Water Work \(MWW\) Plant Collection](#), WaterWise irrigation or drought-tolerant turf. And, the community with the most pledges per capita will be crowned Make Water Work Champions.

"We're very proud to be two-time winners of the Make Water Work Championship, first in 2015 and then again in 2017," Pieper added, challenging his fellow mayors to try and take the title. "We look forward to retaining the title in 2018!"

After taking their own pledges and issuing their challenges, the mayors were given a brief lesson on low-water landscaping by Okanagan Xeriscape Association (OXA) Executive Director Gwen Steele. They were provided with gardening gloves, good soil, hand shovels, plants from the MWW Plant Collection, watering cans, and invited to work in the UnH2O garden and show what they learned.

"We're having fun, but there's also a serious message," explained OBWB Communications Director Corinne Jackson, who's also responsible for the Okanagan WaterWise program and its MWW campaign. "We are currently on track to have the same type of summer this year, as we did last year, flooding followed by drought. As with last year's flooding, water treatment plants in the valley are being overwhelmed. Conserving water can help alleviate the pressure on our infrastructure.

"At the same time, we are expecting a hotter than normal summer and the possibility of another drought and extreme fire season," she added. "Outdoor residential water use is the second highest use of all water in the Okanagan. If we can save water on our landscapes, we will have more water for food crops, firefighting, and for the fish when they return in the fall."

Now in its 8th year, the MWW program promotes tips and tools to help residents do their part to conserve water. One way to do this, and especially relevant at this time of year, is to prepare yards to slow, spread and sink water on site as a conservation method, as well as to reduce stormwater runoff and protect water quality.

The '[Slow it. Spread it. Sink it! – Okanagan Homeowners Guide](#)' has been especially popular, as has the MWW Plant Collection, Jackson said.

"Make Water Work is a great way to get people excited about making changes in their yards to be more WaterWise," Steele agreed, noting the plant collection was developed in partnership between OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise, OXA and Bylands Nurseries to include commonly known, readily available WaterWise plant choices. It features 54 plants including perennials, grasses and shrubs, hedging and trees.

"It's a jumping off point for people who are interested in starting a WaterWise garden," added Steele, noting that the plants were selected from a much wider database available on the OXA website.

Residents can Take the Challenge and pledge to conserve, enter the contest, find the Make Water Work Plant Collection, the "[Slow it. Spread it. Sink it!](#)" guide, and water restrictions for their community, by visiting [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca).

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