

Okanagan Communities Reaffirm Water Conservation Commitment

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Okanagan Valley's mayors gathered yesterday at the UnH2O Gardens to talk water conservation. Following a difficult year of flood, record-breaking temperatures, and as talk turns to the possibility of another drought this year, there was a strong commitment to participate in the Okanagan Basin Water Board's annual WaterWise program.

"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," said 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 Campol of Osoyoos. The mayors pledged to Make Water Work this summer more effectively and efficiently and challenged their residents to go to the [Make Water Work](#) 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 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!"



Photo (L-R) Blair Ireland; Mayor Akbal Mund, West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater, Osoyoos Mike Campol, Armstrong Mayor Chris Pieper, Janet Peake, Acting Mayor for Kelowna and Okanagan Basin Water Board Chair Tracy Gray, and Peachland Mayor Cindy Fortin.

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," said OBWB communications director Corinne Jackson.

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.

