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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN MAYORS & STUDENTS JOIN FORCES TO ENCOURAGE WATER CONSERVATION

Kelowna, B.C. – With the forecast for another hot, dry Okanagan summer, students from École Glenmore Elementary and mayors from throughout the valley joined forces today to commit to being WaterWise, inviting residents to join them. The gathering comes as the Okanagan Basin Water Board's Okanagan WaterWise program, and Okanagan municipalities and water utilities kick off their annual residential outdoor water conservation campaign "Make Water Work." It was also a celebration of the school's new "Seeds of Learning" garden.

"This is the perfect spot for such a celebration as we prepare for summer and encourage residents to do their part to protect the waters of the Okanagan. We've got children and adults sharing their hopes and demonstrating action to help ensure a secure water future," said Water Board Communications Director Corinne Jackson, who manages the Okanagan WaterWise program and its Make Water Work campaign.

Make Water Work is a valley-wide initiative by local governments and water utilities, encouraging conservation in Canada's most water-stressed region. Now in its 9th year, the program provides tips and tools to help residents conserve outdoors – tackling the 2nd highest use of all Okanagan water. In recent years, with flooding, the program has also encouraged residents to prepare their yards to slow, spread and sink water on site as a conservation method, and to reduce stormwater runoff and protect water quality. As part of the campaign, residents are encouraged to pledge to conserve at www.MakeWaterWork.ca and invite local family and friends to do the same with the chance to win WaterWise yard prizes thanks to partners like ProSource Irrigation and several garden centres.

"Greta Thunberg, a 16 year old student from Sweden who has been sounding the alarm on climate change, sums it up pretty well. 'We need to treat the crisis as a crisis. We need to act while we still have time,'" noted Glenmore Principal Wendy Briggs. "I want my students, and my grandchildren, and their grandchildren, to be able to live in a world surrounded by clean water and a healthy ecosystem."

In addressing the crowd of about 250 students, teachers, mayors and more, Grade 5 teachers Lisa Marques and Katie Wihak explained how their Seeds of Learning garden began.

"This came about, last year, during our unit on water. We spent a lot of time outside and learned about plants and water use. We realized that changing how we plant in the Okanagan is an important step in being more WaterWise," said Marques. Added Wihak, "We also wanted to help our pollinators by planting flowers that support them. Also, with growing numbers in our school, we have been losing communal learning and play places, and we wanted to create a beautiful space where we can learn and play."

Students and teachers, inspired by a visit to the Okanagan Xeriscape Association (OXA)'s UnH2O Garden and Okanagan College's *na'ʔk'wulamən* (*na - kool - a - men*) indigenous garden, used several of the plants contained in the [Make Water Work Plant Collection](#). The collection was chosen by OkWaterWise in partnership with OXA and Bylands Nursery to promote plant material best suited to the Okanagan's climate.

As part of today's event, mayors partnered up with Glenmore students to complete some planting in the school's garden with the guidance of OXA's garden manager Alison Mooney. The Mayors also pledged to do their part to Make Water Work this summer and encouraged their residents to do the same, noting that the municipality with the most pledges will be crowned "Make Water Work Community Champion." Past champions include Oliver in 2014, followed by Armstrong in 2015, Peachland in 2016, and then Armstrong again in 2017 and 2018.

Mayors participating in today's event included Osoyoos' Sue McKortoff (OBWB Chair), Vernon's Victor Cumming, Colin Basran of Kelowna, West Kelowna's Gord Milsom, Peachland's Cindy Fortin, Toni Boot of Summerland, Oliver's Martin Johansen and Armstrong's Chris Pieper. Acting Mayors Gerry Popoff represented Spallumcheen and Penny Gambell represented Lake Country.

According to Jackson, residents who are looking to WaterWise their yards have several options with three new garden centres having joined the campaign to promote the *Make Water Work Plant Collection*. Garden centre partners include: Blue Mountain Nursery in Armstrong and, new this year, Shepherd's Hardware also in Armstrong. Swan Lake Nurseryland in Vernon and new participant Nicholas Alexander Landscaping in Vernon. New Lake Country partner Ace Hardware, Grasslands in Summerland, GardenWorks in Penticton, Sagebrush Nursery in Oliver and Sandhu Greenhouses in Osoyoos.

"We had a snowpack that was below normal this winter. And, with little precipitation so far this spring to make up for it, we're concerned that the valley could be headed for drought this summer," she said. "This long weekend's forecast for cooler weather makes it a great time to get to work making our yards more WaterWise," added Jackson.

To pledge and find the Make Water Work Plant Collection, visit www.MakeWaterWork.ca.

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