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COMMUNITY

Okanagan Mayors lend support to virtual water conservation challenge

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Local Journalism Initiative

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (O.B.W.B.) has launched its annual Make Water Work campaign by replacing the usual public launch with a virtual pledge from mayors around the area.


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Osoyoos Mayor Sue McKortoff was joined in the video by mayors from Summerland, Penticton, Kelowna, Peachland, Oliver and other municipalities to show what they are doing to conserve water this summer.

The video is intended to encourage water conservation through the annual community competition hosted by the O.B.W.B., which awards one community with the title of the Make Water Work Community Champion.

“With the current COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for physical distancing, we had to get creative.” said communications director, Corrine Jackson, in an emailed statement. “We thought this would be a fun way to get the message out and the mayors were wonderfully game.”

Each mayor was asked to submit a 30 second video outlining their pledges for the year, which Jackson said achieved the same outcome as the usual public launch, to get the mayor’s outside and in their own gardens to promote the cause.

Mayor McKortoff happily complied. As chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, McKortoff is very concerned about the forecasted hot summer ahead. She is pledging to optimize her personal irrigation system to reduce the amount of water used this year.

“For many years we’ve had high snow and rain in spring, and then a couple months later we are dry and dealing with drought,” she explained in the emailed statement. “As our valley grows and with increased use during the summer months, for orchards, vineyards, and people’s yards, it’s important that we create more resilient landscapes and use water wisely.”

The Okanagan’s dry, arid climate makes droughts and water shortages a common occurrence in the summer months. Reducing water use in personal gardens is an easy way for residents to help combat possible droughts.

The O.B.W.B. has a growing list of plants on their website that can help in this regard. Plants on the list need less water to survive as they are well suited to the dry, hot climate. The team behind the Make Water Work campaign has teamed up with Okanagan Xeriscape Association to increase the list from 54 to 104 plants this year, including a number of native and edible options.

Plants from the list are available at nurseries around the Okanagan, including Sagebrush Nursery in Oliver and Sandhu Greenhouses in Osoyoos. Residents can get a discount for the plants by entering their pledge online, which goes towards helping their community compete for the Make Water Work champion title.

“The competition has been fun but, really, we all win when we help protect the water of our valley,” added McKortoff.