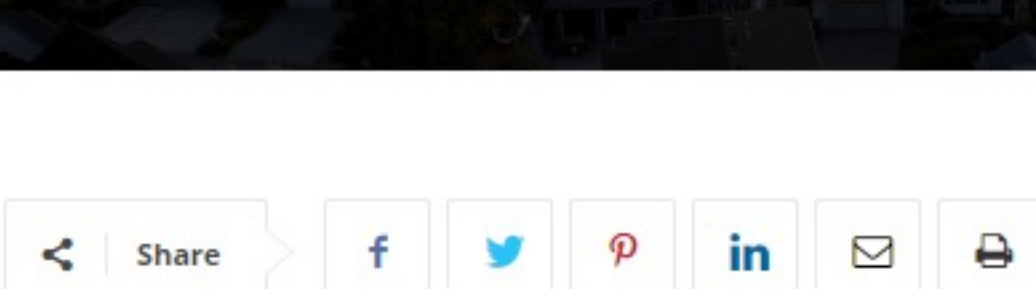




National News

# 2020 B.C. AquaHacking Challenge Winners Announced

By **Simran Chaktha** - June 29, 2020 159 0



The Okanagan Basin Water Board and Aqua Forum have announced the winners of the 2020 B.C. AquaHacking Challenge.

The two organizations hosted a live event online on June 25, 2020. Five final teams, representing universities from across Canada, presented their pitches to address water challenges in B.C. and beyond. Judges and participants voted for their top choices and winners were announced.

"We are grateful to OBWB for their invaluable partnership in making the B.C. AquaHacking Challenge such a success, and look forward to building on this in the near future," said Desiree McGraw, chief executive officer of Aqua Forum. "We salute and celebrate the final teams who embody our mission to engage and empower the next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, and ideas in solving pressing water problems."



The winners of the 2020 B.C. AquaHacking Challenge are:

- 5th place—**UniteAG** from the University of Victoria and from Queens University presented a solution to tackle stormwater contamination.
- 4th place—**Elite** from UBC Okanagan presented a solution to tackle stormwater contamination.
- 3rd place—**Above Atlantis** from UBC Vancouver and Simon Fraser University presented a solution to address flood risk.
- 2nd place—**Gravity Assisted Particle Separation Systems (GAPSS)** from UBC Okanagan presented a solution to tackle stormwater contamination.
- 1st place— **Ozero** from Sherbrooke University presented a solution to address invasive mussels.

The final prizes are \$20,000 in seed funding to the 1st place team, \$15,000 for 2nd place team, \$10,000 for 3rd place team, and \$2,500 for the teams that placed fourth and fifth. In addition, the teams are awarded a spot in a local business incubator, and promotional video and media coverage for their new start-up. Of course, there's also the lasting impact that these projects have on our freshwater.

An additional prize of \$1,000 was awarded to the Audience's Top Choice—Team Elite.

"I'm so pleased and proud of the work of all the teams, and was delighted with the strong showing of the hometown teams," said Anna Warwick Sears, executive director of OBWB. "We are very happy to see these projects go forward to become start-up innovations. And we are very pleased that the first-place team, Ozero, is focused on preventing the spread of invasive mussels! All of these issues are so important to the people of the Okanagan, and elsewhere. We welcome new partners and new solutions to help address them."

Olivier Liberge, co-founder and communications manager for Ozero, explained that his team was working on a ballast wash to combat invasive zebra and quagga mussels as part of their Bachelor's degree when they learned of the B.C. AquaHacking Challenge. "We chose the project because we were interested in the lakes of Quebec and Canada, and making them a better place. We know water is a valuable resource and we wanted to preserve it," Liberge said.

Indeed, invasive mussels was one of five focus areas that chosen as part of the B.C. AquaHacking Challenge. The others were stormwater contamination, flood risk, outdoor water use, and drinking water in Indigenous communities.

"We've seen mussels in our lakes and how they propagate very easily, and so we wanted to tackle this problem," Liberge said. "You can see that they have caused biodiversity to drop. And because they are filter feeders, the water is clear, but algae has more access to light so this creates toxic algae blooms."

"Our beaches are covered in mussel shells that smell," added Liberge. "It's very sad. Tourists don't go there. With this prize, we will be able to take our product out across Canada and prevent more lakes from being invaded from this and other aquatic invasive species. We are very excited."

And to the other four teams, Liberge noted that the issues they are also tackling are important as well. "We wish them all the very best," said Liberge.

To watch the broadcast of the B.C. AquaHacking Challenge final, visit the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise Facebook page here. A program with more on the teams, their solutions, the judges can be found here.

Funders of the 2020 B.C. AquaHacking Challenge include: De Gaspé Beaubien Foundation, RBC Foundation, Real Estate Foundation of BC, Teck Resources, Telus Friendly Future Foundation, IBM, Mitacs, Ovivo, and Lavery Lawyers.

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