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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **OKANAGAN SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS WATER AWARENESS**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – A recent telephone survey of Okanagan residents conducted for the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) finds growing concern for water issues in the valley and support for conservation and protection.

“Despite being known for our lakes, the Okanagan has among the lowest amounts of water available in Canada, and yet we have one of the highest rates of water use,” said OBWB Chair Sue McKortoff. “Anything we can do to make people aware of this precious resource, and protect it, is important.”

Corinne Jackson is Communications Director for the Water Board and manages its Okanagan WaterWise outreach program. Continued population growth and the impacts of climate change on water availability and quality, create even greater challenges, Jackson added. “The survey is an important tool in helping us gauge awareness and understanding of our water issues, which in turn can help guide our public outreach, as well as other water management efforts.”

The Water Board hired an Okanagan polling firm to conduct the survey which included 500 residents, stratified to ensure equal representation from throughout the valley. A survey of this size is considered accurate within  $\pm 4.4\%$ . A similar survey was conducted in 2014.

Some of the major highlights of this year’s survey include:

- a **growing concern about the impacts of forest fires, invasive mussels and climate change**

Whereas fires and mussels were the top 2 concerns in 2014, the climate crisis has risen to #3 (receiving an average rating of 7.1 out of 10 in 2020, compared to 5.9 in 2014).

- **85% of respondents stated they practice water conservation**

Among those who say they conserve, the #1 method identified was *watering their yard less* (53% of responses). This is good news, added Jackson, saying that this is truly where Okanagan residents can have the greatest impact on their consumption and the reason for the OBWB-Okanagan WaterWise “Make Water Work” campaign. Other conservation methods used: **43%** indicated they *wash clothes with fuller loads* (up from 37% in 2014) and **39%** *use the dishwasher less with fuller loads* (up from 19% in 2014). Some **18%** indicated they *changed to low-water landscape* (up from 10% in 2014) – and a key Make Water Work message.

- **52% said they protect water quality**

Among the top ways they protect water they: *do not put anything down the storm drain* (**63%**), *don’t flush unused medications and return them to the pharmacy* (**34%**), *do not wash fats, oil or grease down the drain and instead dispose in the garbage* (**33%**). Another **26%** said they *do not use chemical fertilizers on lawn or garden*. As for those who don’t protect water quality, **68%** *were not sure why or hadn’t thought about it*.

“As water utilities try to address ongoing water quality issues, the importance of messaging ways to keep the water clean is becoming a growing issue. And not just in the valley bottom, but also in the backcountry – the source of water for many residents,” Jackson added.

- 85% have heard of invasive zebra and quagga mussels; 55% have heard the OBWB-OkWaterWise's "Don't Move A Mussel" (DMM) message

Among those surveyed, awareness of the DMM message is highest with watercraft owners (73%), respondents 18-39 years old (76%), and males (64%). And, when asked the purpose of the DMM message, 64% said to *clean your watercraft before going into the lake* (up from 36% in 2014).

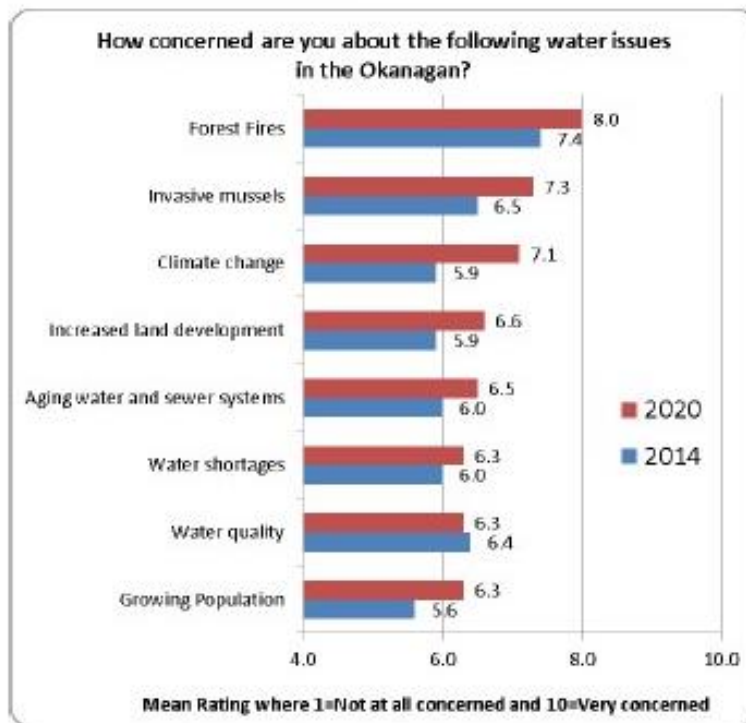
"With continued concern about the introduction of invasive mussels into our waters, it is great to see the level of awareness for this issue and the understanding that 'Clean, Drain, Dry' is an important solution to keeping it out," Jackson said.

"Thank you to all who participated," added McKortoff. "These survey results show us what we need to do better and will help guide the work of the board, staff, and residents of our valley, to be even better water stewards."

Please find a few graphs from the survey attached below.

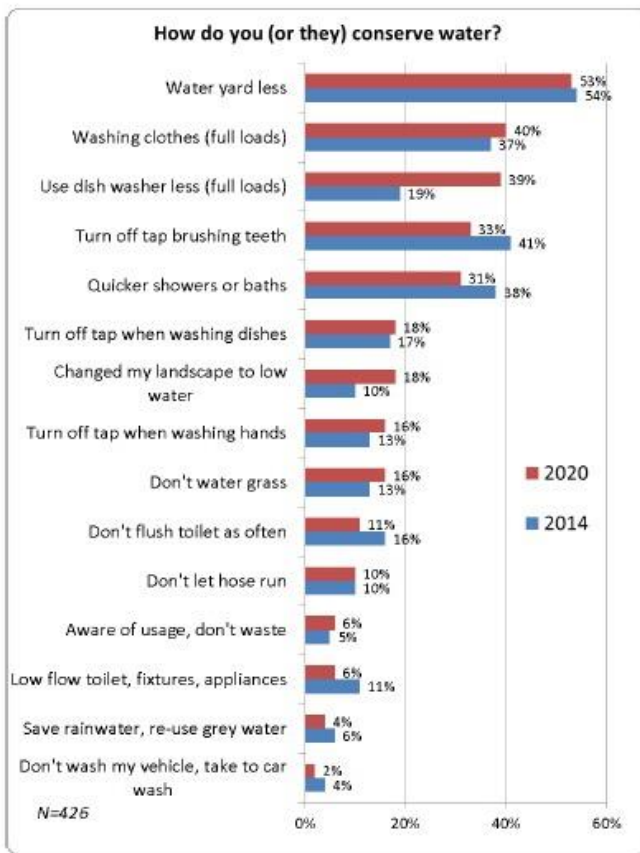
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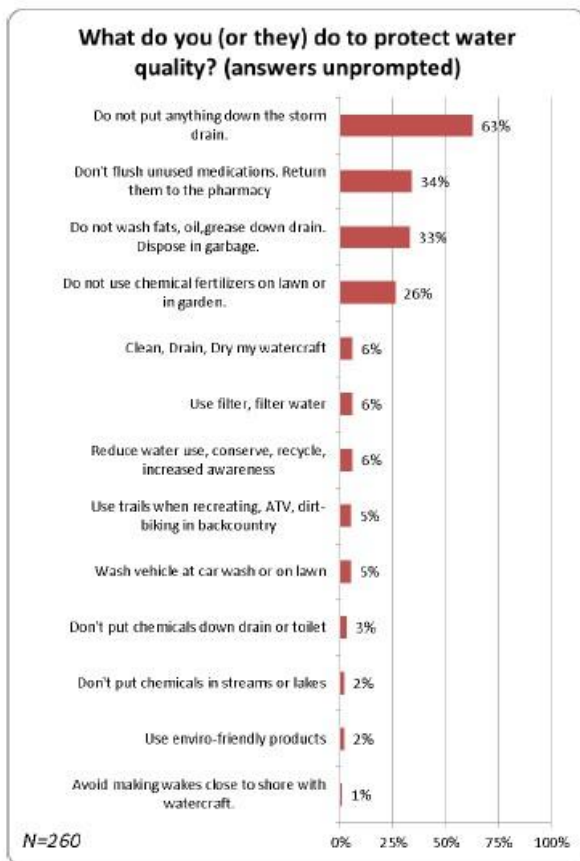
Residents are most concerned about *forest fires*, receiving an average rating of 8.0 out of 10 in 2020. *Invasive mussels* received an average rating of 7.3 out of 10.

Concerns about *climate change* received an average rating of 7.1 in 2020 compared to 5.9 in 2014.



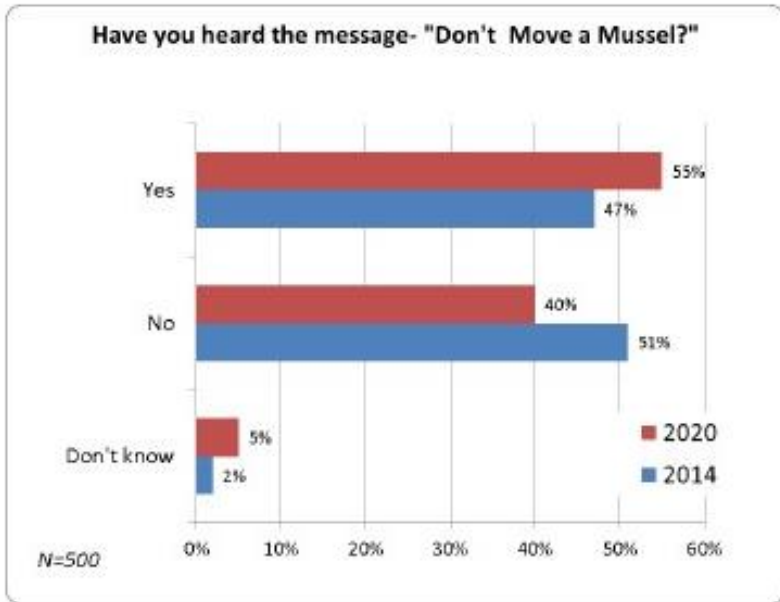
Among the 426 Residents who conserve water, 53% conserve by watering their yard less. Forty-percent indicated they wash clothes with fuller loads (up from 37% in 2014) and 39% use the dishwasher less with fuller loads (up from 19% in 2014).

It is encouraging to see that 18% indicated they changed to low-water landscape (up from 10% in 2014).

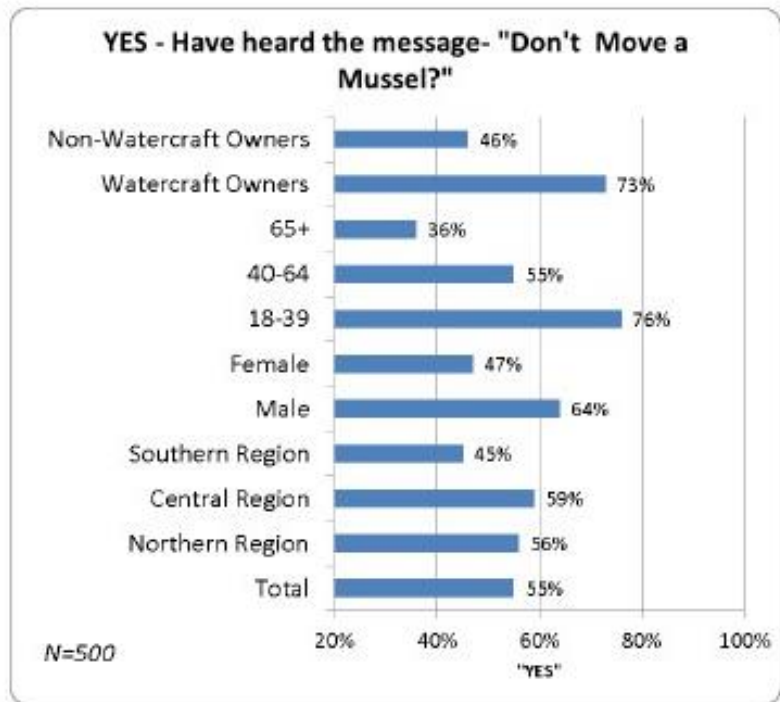


Among the 260 respondents that protect water quality, 63% do not put anything down the storm drain and 34% don't flush unused medications.

Only 5% indicated they use the trails when recreating, ATV'ing, or dirt biking in the backcountry. It is possible backcountry users are not aware that staying on the trail is a means of protecting water quality.



The majority (55%) had heard of the 'Don't Move a Mussel' message.



Awareness of the "Don't Move a Mussel" message was highest among watercraft owners (73%), respondents aged 18-39 (76%); and males (64%).