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NEWS RELEASE

AQUAHACKING CHALLENGE EXPANDS INTO WESTERN CANADA FOR 2021, TACKLING FRESHWATER ISSUES

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and Aqua Forum are pleased to once again partner together, this time co-hosting the *AquaHacking 2021 – Western Canada Challenge*. Last year, the organizations brought the challenge to B.C. for the first time.

AquaHacking is a tech challenge for post-secondary students and young professionals with an interest in freshwater issues, clean-tech innovation and entrepreneurship. As part of the Western Canada AquaHacking Challenge, participants from B.C. to Manitoba are asked to tackle one of five water issues and are paired with mentors to help develop and launch real-world solutions and eventually start-ups.

“We are excited to declare the AquaHacking 2021 Challenge in Western Canada open,” says OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears. “The AquaHacking format is a fantastic way of bringing people together in a common – and important – cause. It’s wonderful to be expanding beyond B.C.,” she added.

Kariann Aarup, AquaHacking Director, agrees. “We are very pleased to continue to work in partnership with OBWB and co-host the 2021 Western Canadian AquaHacking Challenge. This tech innovation challenge is an excellent opportunity to engage young talent to work on water issues that still need solutions. We are excited to be engaging with water organizations and post-secondary institutions in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.”

The five water issues, selected by an advisory committee and to be addressed as part of this year’s Western Canada challenge, include:

- 1) **Optimization of drinking water/wastewater treatment plants** (Answering the question: How can we improve the operations of primary water/wastewater utility infrastructure?)
- 2) **On-Farm nutrient capture and recycling** (Answering the question: How can we capture and reuse the valuable nutrients from livestock operations and improve the health of nearby rivers, lakes and aquifers?)
- 3) **Improvements to water systems for Indigenous communities** (Answering the question: How can we improve access to clean drinking water for Indigenous communities in Western Canada?)
- 4) **Toxic algal blooms** (Answering the question: How can we improve testing and reduce the incidence of toxic algal blooms?)
- 5) **Innovative ‘social’ technologies for water information** (Answering the question: Are there new ways we can link to existing social media and communications technologies to support community access to water information?)

The advisory committee is made up of representatives from government, the tech sector, and various water-related non-government agencies, including science and funding-based organizations. “All five water issues developed as part of this challenge are relevant across Western Canada, and beyond, and will support communities large and small,” added Sears. “I can’t wait to see what innovative technologies the hackers come up with.”

This challenge is one of two AquaHacking events being held across Canada in 2021, with a second challenge being held in Quebec in the Mille Îles River’s watershed. With both events, students and early-

career professionals who participate will receive mentorship, skill building workshops, and compete for more than \$50,000 in prizes as seed funding and a secured spot in a local start-up incubator.

Supporters and funders of the Western Canada Challenge include: De Gaspe Beaubien Foundation, Okanagan Basin Water Board, RBC Foundation, Lavery Lawyers, Ovivo, Mitacs and Teck Resources.

Implementation partners are: Hackworks, Waterlution and the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise education and outreach program.

For more on the Western Canada AquaHacking Challenge, to register, or to become a local funding or academic partner, visit <https://aquahacking.com/en/westerncanada2021/>.

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About Aqua Forum

Aqua Forum is a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness of water issues among Canadians. Its flagship program, the AquaHacking Challenge, is an innovative competition that engages young Canadians in developing entrepreneurial skills and creating tech solutions to freshwater issues. Since 2015, eight challenges have been held, resulting in 28 startups which continue to be active to this day. Find out more at <https://aquahacking.com>.

About Okanagan Basin Water Board

The **Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB)** is unique to Canada and was formed in 1970 as a valley-wide partnership to identify and resolve critical water issues in the Okanagan watershed. Its Board of Directors includes representatives from the three Okanagan regional districts, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, the Water Supply Association of BC and the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council (WSC) – a technical advisory body to the board. The OBWB provides three main services: a Milfoil Control Program, Sewage Facilities Grants Program, and the Water Management Program which includes the WSC, Water Research, Water Conservation and Quality Improvement Grants, and Communications and Outreach. Learn more at <https://www.obwb.ca/>.