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NEWS RELEASE

NEW OKANAGAN OUTDOOR WATER EDUCATION GUIDES ANSWER CALL FOR LOCAL RESOURCES

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and its Okanagan WaterWise program have launched *Our Relationship with Water in the Okanagan – Explorations in Outdoor Education to Support the B.C. Curriculum*, a locally-developed series of guides for teachers.

“Today, there is a lot of interest in outdoor education due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Corinne Jackson, OBWB’s Communications Director who also manages its Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program. “One might think this is in response to that, but in fact this has been a few years in the making, with several partners providing their expertise to the project. We’re thrilled to share these free and easily downloadable resources!

“We receive a number of calls from teachers asking us to come in to talk with students about the water of the Okanagan, and the issues we face here specifically. But we’re a small office,” Jackson explained. “We hope that these resources will give teachers some of the background information needed to teach about this important topic in their classes and the confidence and tools to engage students outdoors, in or near the water.”

The colourful and easy-to-follow guides were created in collaboration with *Syilx* Knowledge Keepers, several partners in education, including staff at School District 22 and 23, UBC Okanagan (UBCO)'s School of Education, and are suitable for Kindergarten to Grade 12.

“As we were working on the guides, it was very important that these fit within the curriculum. But it is also an authentic source of local information for educators,” added Desiree Marshall-Peer, who is a professor at UBCO’s School of Education and who helped with the guides. “It’s a one-stop shop for all things dealing with Okanagan outdoor and water education – accessible for teachers with experience or those just starting.”

The guides include an “Introduction” module with tips for successful outdoor education, an introduction to local Indigenous perspectives and culture, the project’s connection to B.C.’s Applied Design, Skills, and Technologies Curriculum, and Monday-morning-ready lesson plans and worksheets. The “Okanagan Watershed and Climate” module, includes background on the valley’s water, up-to-date research on the impacts of climate change, *Syilx* perspectives, and several more activities. The third guide, “Building Outdoor Learning Spaces” includes information on types of outdoor spaces and how to take a project from the vision and design stage to construction and maintenance.

Pamela Barnes is one of the Knowledge Keepers consulted on the project. “It’s so important that the Indigenous worldview be shared, because it’s been missing,” Barnes noted.

As the Okanagan continues to face challenges with population growth and climate change, people will need to learn to live more sustainably, she added. There is a growing understanding that there is much to be learned from Traditional Ecological Knowledge. “Recognizing the people who have lived here for 1000s of years, who have an intimate relationship with the land and that we have something to share, is essential.”

The guides were recently presented at a Professional Development workshop attended by teachers throughout the Okanagan, including Melissa Bishop, a Grade 2 teacher at Anne McClymont Elementary. In addition to the guides, attendees were introduced to a number of materials available to educators on the [Okanagan WaterWise](#) website.

“The website is amazing,” says Bishop. “There is so much information, and great videos. It’s not easy to find local information, especially with the new curriculum. I’m looking forward to exploring the new guides.”

According to Bishop, she already knows the benefits of outdoor education and is fortunate to have an outdoor learning space at her school, and Okanagan Lake nearby. But this year, outdoor learning has taken on greater importance with the pandemic. For those looking to spend more time with students outside, these guides will be helpful, she said. “It’s really good timing!”

Our Relationship with Water in the Okanagan was developed with the support of the Real Estate Foundation of BC, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program.

For more on the *Our Relationship with Water in the Okanagan* guides, please visit <https://okwaterwise.ca/waterwise-for-educators.html>.

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