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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN CHIEFS & MAYORS GATHER TO ENCOURAGE WATER CONSERVATION

Kelowna, B.C. – As the Okanagan continued to smash temperature records and smoke, from an earlier-than-normal fire season in B.C. and Alberta, blanketed the valley, local First Nations and municipalities gathered yesterday to once again encourage residents to be WaterWise this summer. It was all part of the annual kick-off of the “Make Water Work” campaign, led by the Okanagan Basin Water Board’s Okanagan WaterWise program, delivered in partnership with local governments and utilities throughout the valley.

“It’s incumbent upon us to protect our water sources and the biggest pillar in that is conservation,” said OBWB Vice-chair and Lake Country Mayor Blair Ireland, encouraging Okanagan residents to visit www.MakeWaterWork.ca and find easy but effective tips that will help them conserve.

“As the Okanagan’s climate changes – with hotter, drier summers, and as our population increases – the importance of being WaterWise is becoming more and more important,” added Corinne Jackson, OBWB’s Communications Director. The ribbon of lakes that flow through the valley has created a myth of abundance. The fact is, she added, research shows there is less water available per person than anywhere in Canada and yet, the Okanagan has one of the highest rates of water use per person in Canada. After agriculture, the 2nd largest use of water in the Okanagan is for watering our household lawns & gardens. And, as the population continues to grow and the valley experiences the effects of climate change, the strain on the Okanagan’s water supply will intensify. “It’s a real problem, but we have solutions,” she noted.

With the event held next to the Okanagan Xeriscape Association’s UnH2O demonstration garden, Ireland and others noted the variety of beautiful plants that can grow here with little supplemental watering, many of which are included in the Make Water Work Plant Collection. Ireland also gave a shout out to the 10 irrigation partner and garden centres that have lined up as Make Water Work partners to help residents transition to be more WaterWise.

This year, Kel Lake Garden Centre in Lake Country and Kelowna’s Wild Bloom Nursery have joined the campaign and are carrying the plant collection, along with Blue Mountain Nursery in Armstrong, Nicholas Alexander Landscaping and Swan Lake Market & Garden in Vernon, Ace Hardware in Lake Country, Better Earth Gardens in Kelowna, GardenWorks in Penticton, Sagebrush Nursery in Oliver and Sandhu Greenhouses in Osoyoos. The campaign is also working with ProSource Irrigation to promote WaterWise irrigation product.

“Water is king in this valley. Water is the most important thing,” said Okanagan Indian Band Chief Byron Louis. However, it is not protected the way it should be, he added. Louis went on to challenge valley landscapers to use more native plants and grasses like those on the Make Water Work plant list. Not only will they use less water, but they will also provide greater benefit to local pollinators and to the larger ecosystem.

Armstrong Mayor Joe Cramer, Westbank First Nation Coun. Jordan Coble, West Kelowna Mayor Gord Milson, OBWB Chair and Osoyoos Mayor Sue McKortoff, and Town of Oliver Mayor Martin Johansen made similar pitches for water conservation. “As demands on water in the Okanagan grow, we all need to pay attention and do our part, ensuring enough water is in our streams in the fall for returning salmon, for farmers and their late harvest food crops, and for firefighting,” said McKortoff.

Residents are being encouraged to visit www.MakeWaterWork.ca and pledge to make water work better, and to invite friends and family to join them. Pledges include:

1. Water lawn between dusk and dawn.
2. Water plants, not pavement.
3. Never mow low. Let it grow.
4. Choose plants suitable to our dry climate.
5. Tune up my irrigation.
6. Aerate my lawn and top dress with compost.

As incentive for their pledge residents will be eligible to win one of two \$500 WaterWise yard upgrades. And to add some fun, the community with the most pledges per capita at the end of the campaign in mid-October will be crowned “Make Water Work Community Champions.”

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