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## NEWS RELEASE

# OKANAGAN WATER BOARD ANNUAL MEETING REFLECTS ON VALLEY'S EXTREME WEATHER & BUILDING RESILIENCY

**Kelowna, B.C. – Syilx Territory** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) held its Annual Meeting today at Rotary Centre for the Arts in Kelowna, with presentations and discussions around this year's theme of "Building a Resilient Region – Come Heat or High Water."

This year's theme acknowledges the extreme weather events experienced in the Okanagan in recent years – historic flooding, historic temperatures, drought, and fires. It also acknowledges the connection these events have to water, and Water Board efforts to work with local governments and utilities, fishery departments, agriculture, residents, and others, to understand the issues, prepare and build resiliency.

"When I look back on this past year, but also over the last several years, climate change is the prevailing issue we've been working on, especially after the 2003 Okanagan Mountain Park fire," explains Water Board Executive Director Dr. Anna Warwick Sears. These projects have included working with partners to determine the water needs of fish and to maintain healthy ecosystems, a valley-wide campaign to help residents conserve water, the development of tools to help farmers protect their crops against drought, and the OBWB's new Climate Indicators Dashboard.

"The increasing number of extreme weather events means we need to change our practices," added Sears, listing examples, including how to determine bridge heights and pipe sizes to withstand large water volumes during spring freshet. But it also means planning for low-water seasons in the summer when demand is highest. "These issues are best addressed on a watershed scale and in collaboration with partners," she said.

One of the biggest issues facing the valley right now is how do we share the valley's water supply during drought, Sears noted. There are communities and sectors that depend on it. How are agreements reached to share it?

To help address this question, the OBWB invited Zane Marshall, Director of Water Resources for the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA), to provide the keynote address and share lessons from the Colorado River Basin, known as the world's most controlled and litigated river system. The Okanagan and Colorado Basins have much in common, Marshall explained, noting a growing population, strong tourism sector, and water scarcity issues made worse with climate change, including shorter winters with less precipitation.

"Our water supply is changing and so we have had to change," he said, adding that after 25 years of dwindling water supplies "we're not calling it drought anymore. We're calling it long-term aridification."

In response, the SNWA has introduced programs to reduce consumption and they've updated infrastructure, including drilling a water intake lower, to draw water if the Lake Mead reservoir drops further. The water authority is also injecting water into an aquifer to bank supply. "Water management in water scarce places is a wicked problem that requires collaboration to solve them," Marshall added. "No one entity and no one solution can solve it typically. Working together is important. And, if you think you need to take action, you probably should have started yesterday. Act now to put things in place because policy takes time, action takes time, and funding takes time."

Following Marshall's presentation, and Sears' delivery of the OBWB's annual report on work conducted during the past fiscal year (April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024), there was the annual awarding of the "Make Water Work Community Champion."

Make Water Work is an annual outdoor water conservation campaign delivered by the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program, in partnership with local governments and utilities throughout the valley. The campaign runs May to October, when water demands are highest, and includes the collection of pledges. Since 2014, the OBWB has been awarding the "Make Water Work Community Champion" title to the community with the most pledges collected per capita.

The Town of Oliver won in 2014 and regained the title this year. The town's mayor, Martin Johansen, responded to the win stating: "On behalf of the Town of Oliver, I would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude on winning the Make Water Work championship title. Our small town came together, rallied the most votes per capita and proudly brings home the victory!"

"Understanding that we live in one of Canada's most water-stressed regions, it's vital that we conserve water for the future of our community and subsequent generations. Thank you to the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its Okanagan WaterWise program for organizing this event each year. We're already looking forward to next year's campaign," he added.

Although the Make Water Work community champion title has been announced, the campaign will continue into October. Thanks to cooler temperatures and some precipitation, the Province of B.C. lowered the Okanagan region to Level 2 drought this week. However, the South Okanagan's Shingle, Shuttleworth and Inkaneep creeks were left at Level 3 (where adverse impacts to socio-economic and ecosystem values are possible), and Vaseux remains at the highest level, 5 (where adverse impacts are almost certain). Residents are asked to continue to follow their local water restrictions. Restrictions for Okanagan utilities, as well as tips to conserve, can be found at [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca). While on the website, residents can pledge until Sept. 29 to be entered to win a \$500 gift card to help WaterWise their yard.

A copy of the OBWB's 2024 annual report, *Building a Resilient Region: Come Heat or High Water*, will be available on our website soon at [www.obwb.ca/overview/annual-reports/](http://www.obwb.ca/overview/annual-reports/).