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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**OKANAGAN WATER CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN DELIVERS WINS,
DESPITE CONTINUED DROUGHT**

Kelowna, B.C. – Sylix Territory – The Okanagan’s annual valley-wide outdoor water conservation campaign – “[Make Water Work](#)” – is coming to an end for the year. But, even as people start to blow out their home irrigation and farmers harvest their fall crops, the Okanagan remains at a Level 2 drought.

“The drought this year certainly wasn’t as bad as 2023, when severe drought fueled a frightening fire season in the Okanagan. In part, we can thank residents who did their part to conserve this year. But there were still impacts on crops, and on fish. And we still haven’t recovered from two years of drought,” notes Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) Communications Director Corinne Jackson, who has been managing the board’s Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program and Make Water Work. “This means we need fall rains, a good snowpack, and a nice slow spring melt to recover. Whether that happens, or not, we can’t predict,” she added.

With days getting cooler and rains forecast in the next few days, Jackson said water managers are hoping it brings relief to some Okanagan streams that have been struggling this year. In particular, the South Okanagan’s Shingle and Shatford Creek remain at Level 3, Shuttleworth Creek is at Level 4 and has had problems with fish passage, and Vaseux – which is dry at the mouth – is at Level 5. During a regional drought call yesterday, it was decided to keep the Okanagan at Level 2 until the impact of the potential rains is known.

At Level 2 adverse impacts to socioeconomic or ecosystem values (e.g. impacts for farmers, or aquatic life including fish) are unlikely. At Level 3, these impacts become “possible,” at Level 4 they are “likely,” and at Level 5 they are “almost certain.”

“We were very happy to see strong participation in the Make Water Work campaign this year, especially given the concerns around the valley’s water supply and the need for everyone to adopt more WaterWise behaviours,” Jackson said.

Make Water Work is delivered in partnership with local governments, water utilities, and garden centre and irrigation businesses throughout the valley. As part of the campaign, residents were encouraged to pledge to undertake at least one of [six actions to reduce outdoor water use](#) and be entered to win \$500 in WaterWise yard material. Some 318 people pledged and one of this year’s winners is Lisa Boulanger of Kelowna.

Asked why she entered the contest, Boulanger responded that “Water is so precious here and it’s not going to change so we are the ones that have to change.”

As it turns out, Boulanger is with the Kelowna Garden Club which has been encouraging members to move away from the traditional English cottage garden, or to at least use plants better suited to the Okanagan. Among some of the WaterWise gardening practices Boulanger uses is to mulch garden beds in the spring, which feeds plants and helps hold moisture so they require less watering, and she has installed drip irrigation.

“I try to lead by example,” she added, saying she plans to use some of her prize winnings to fix up an irrigation zone and plant an Okanagan-appropriate tree.

In addition to Boulanger’s win, the Town of Oliver reclaimed its “Make Water Work Community Champion” title for collecting the most pledges per capita. This is Oliver’s second win after taking the title in 2014.

But that's not all. Every year, the Make Water Work campaign has improved, grown in scope, and attracted new partners, and this year was no exception. This year, the campaign partnered with FireSmartBC, noting the plants on the *Make Water Work Plant Collection* list that are also deemed FireSmart.

"This was important to us, knowing that our communities need to be prepared for both drought and fire, and that you can have both by following WaterWise and FireSmart principles," Jackson said.

"Fall is an excellent time to plant," she added. Find the *Make Water Work Plant Collection* list and the partners that carry it at www.makewaterwork.ca/plants/. "If you're not ready to do the landscaping work now, it's also a great time to start planning for spring."

Jackson, who launched and has managed the board's Okanagan WaterWise program and its "Make Water Work" and "Don't Move A Mussel!" campaigns, is leaving the organization later this week after 15 years. "It's been a dream to create programs, campaigns and resources in response to real-world, real-Okanagan, issues, and to grow partnerships to expand the reach of the Water Board's messages and efforts," she said.

The Make Water Work campaign was first launched in 2011 and is aimed at tackling the second largest use of water in the valley – residential outdoor use.

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