



**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD
HELD DECEMBER 5, 2023
ONLINE**

PRESENT

Chair Sue McKortoff	Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Vice-Chair Blair Ireland	Regional District Central Okanagan
Director Victor Cumming	Regional District North Okanagan
Director Rick Fairbairn	Regional District North Okanagan
Director Christine Fraser	Regional District North Okanagan
Director Wayne Carson	Regional District Central Okanagan
Director Charlie Hodge	Regional District Central Okanagan
Director Doug Holmes	Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Director Rick Knodel	Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Director Bob Hrasko	Water Supply Association of B.C.
Director Jeremy Fyke	Okanagan Water Stewardship Council (OWSC)

REGRETS

Director Tim Lezard	Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA)
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GUESTS

Alt. Dir. Matt Taylor	Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Simone Runyan	District of Coldstream

STAFF

Anna Warwick Sears	Executive Director
Amanda Burnett	Communications Coordinator
Carolina Restrepo-Tamayo	Office and Grants Manager
Corinne Jackson	Communications Director
James Littlely	Deputy Administrator
Nelson Jatel	Water Stewardship Director
Sandra Schira	Water Science Specialist

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair McKortoff called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Chair McKortoff respectfully acknowledged that the meeting was being held on the traditional and unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation.

2. LATE ITEMS

8.1.1 Letters package from local govts re: OBWB's calls to action on invasive mussels

8.2.2 Letter from B.C.'s Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Nathan Cullen and Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman, regarding the OBWB's calls to action

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

“THAT the agenda of the regular meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board of Dec. 5, 2023 be approved as amended.”

CARRIED

4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

- 4.1 Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board of Nov. 7, 2023, held online.

“THAT the minutes of the regular meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board on Nov. 7, 2023, held online, be approved.”

CARRIED

5. DELEGATION

- 5.1 Natasha Lukey, Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) Fisheries Dept. on the “nlux^wlux^w4cwix (Lower Trout Creek) Restoration Project”

Ms. Lukey was invited to provide an update on the nlux^wlux^w4cwix (Lower Trout Creek) Restoration Project, funded in part through an OBWB Water Conservation and Quality Improvement (WCQI) grant.

The lands where the work is being done was once under the caretakership of the Pierre family and was then transferred to the federal government’s Summerland Research Station, explained Ms. Lukey. Over the years, dams and reservoirs were installed, the creek was narrowed and the floodplain developed. Today, it is the 2nd largest watershed in the Okanagan and supplies the District of Summerland with 90% of its water supply. However, whereas at one time the area was rich with local fish, birds and plant life, the board was told that changes to the area has created problems with flooding, water turbidity, and for the greater ecosystem. In 2019 an Environmental Flow Needs Assessment was done.

Combining local syilx knowledge and western knowledge, the ONA’s Fisheries Department has started to rehabilitate the area, widening the creek to be closer to its natural flow, slowing the water and creating habitat that attracts salmon and other native aquatic life back to the area.

Riparian areas can also help with fire prevention, Ms. Lukey added, noting that the work of ONA and its partners can help rebuild a more resilient landscape. The area has also been dealing with a perpetual slide for several years, with sloughing from the upper bench. The ONA is monitoring to see if work to restore the upper and lower bench is making a difference.

A number of groups have volunteered to help plant the area, including members of the Penticton Indian Band, Summerland Secondary, Agriculture and Ag-Food Canada, and Friends of Summerland Ornamental Gardens. Some of the plants were grown at the En’owkin Centre and are related to plants in the area which is showing great success, including natural cottonwood succession, she said. Despite more restoration needed, fish are beginning to return and so are other wildlife.

The board thanked Ms. Lukey for her presentation. She exited the meeting at 10:42 a.m.

6. STAFF REPORTS

- 6.1 Executive Director Report

Dr. Sears provided an update on the Mission Creek workshop held Dec. 1 co-hosted by the OBWB and MLA Renee Merrifield. Attendees included representatives of the Joe Rich Residents Association, Gorman Bros., City of Kelowna and Rutland Waterworks utilities, ONA, and local farmers. ONA presented on the history of the creek and efforts to rehabilitate the waterway, and Black Mountain Irrigation District spoke about storage and releases to meet water demands. Kelowna spoke about the Mill Creek diversion into Mission Creek, and the province's Okanagan Lake dam manager Shaun Reimer spoke on current policies to manage the lake level, and orphan dikes. The discussion helped highlight gaps in water science and knowledge which will help inform future OBWB projects. Dirs. Blair and Hrasko noted it was a good meeting to hear various perspectives and concerns and help determine what needs to happen next.

The board was told that the current OBWB Strategic Plan goes to the end of 2024. Work is beginning on a review of the plan and preparing an update for 2025-2029. As part of this, staff are working on a review of drought and source protection planning in the valley, metering, water rates and more, to determine water science and planning needs.

Dr. Sears noted that Okanagan Lake is low, at about the 20th percentile for this time of year—only this low 20% of the time in the last 100 years. Warmer temps with El Nino could affect this year's snowpack, she added.

Dir. Holmes said Summerland is looking at saving costs by twinning its water system and not treating agricultural water to drinking water standards, but added that funding is an issue. Dir. Cummings said that Vernon has had the same issue.

Alt. Dir. Taylor entered meeting at 10:55 a.m.

“THAT the Executive Director’s Report, dated Nov. 29, 2023, be received.”
CARRIED

6.2 Deputy Administrator Report

Mr. Littley updated the board on correspondence to the province regarding the OBWB's invasive mussel concerns. The province has noted potential federal funding cuts to their Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP), and problems recruiting and retaining staff. Water Board staff also followed up on an invitation to submit its recommendation for pull-the-plug legislation to the province's Wildlife Act review process. Provincial staff have said that Idaho has been declared a high-risk area for the mussels. Canada Border Services Agency and the province are working closely, watching for watercraft from the area and inspecting as needed. Provincial staff have also agreed to work with the OBWB on its invasive mussel working group, to further develop plans to prevent an infestation and address the mussels should they arrive.

The board discussed sending a letter to the federal government and voice concern about potential funding cuts to the province's IMDP.

“THAT the OBWB send a letter to the federal government, voicing concern about potential funding cuts to the B.C. Invasive Mussel Defence Program.”

CARRIED

Directors were told that letters of support are continuing to come in, supporting the OBWB's call for a temporary moratorium on watercraft coming into B.C., and work is continuing on an Invasive Mussel Vulnerability Guide for those with raw water infrastructure. Plans are also being

set for the first meeting of the working group, looking at how to improve prevention of the mussels from coming into the region, and prepare for mitigation in case of their arrival.

Mr. Littley added that low lake conditions in Wood Lake, due to the drought, is making it difficult to launch and rototill the lake. Staff are looking at hiring a crane to help.

“THAT the Deputy Administrator’s Report, dated Nov. 28, 2023, be received.”

CARRIED

6.3 Office and Grants Manager Report

Ms. Restrepo-Tamayo told the board that the call for Water Conservation and Quality Improvement Grant Program applications has gone out, noting that this year’s theme for additional consideration is drought resilience.

The board was updated on a BC Watersheds Collaborative gathering of water funders and leaders in November. Ms. Restrepo-Tamayo spoke to the gathering about the OBWB’s upcoming Environmental Flows Conference in March and encouraged their attendance and help in spreading the word, and Mr. Littley spoke about invasive mussels encouraging their support in helping address the issue.

“THAT the Office and Grants Manager’s Report, dated Nov. 28, 2023, be received.”

CARRIED

6.4 Water Stewardship Director

Dr. Jatel updated the board on the last Okanagan Water Stewardship Council meeting which included a discussion on invasive mussels and the discussion around the OBWB-led invasive mussel working group. The next meeting, he added, would include a presentation from Christina Ortiz with a Columbian perspective on water issues they are facing. Dir. Fyke added that the council’s policy committee is reviewing governance and conflicts around water and drought last year and how this can be avoided in future years. The council is also looking at having a presentation in the new year from the Canada Water Agency.

Dr. Jatel added that he attended a B.C. provincial environmental flows symposium in Victoria and presented on the Okanagan’s EFN work. It was a valuable precursor to the OBWB’s own conference in March, he said.

“THAT the Water Stewardship Director’s Report, dated Nov. 28, 2023, be received.”

CARRIED

Dir. Fraser entered the meeting at 11:25 a.m.

6.5 Water Science Specialist Report

Ms. Schira told the board that, as of Nov. 27, the Okanagan’s drought levels have not changed and remains at a Level 2 where impact to ecological values are unlikely. However, she added, the valley has been in drought for 26 weeks, since June, or more than half of the year. And, although the larger basin is at Level 2, other sub-basins without upland storage (e.g. Vaseux and Shuttleworth) are at higher drought levels. Water managers are hoping for precipitation this

winter, but parts of B.C. may end up starting 2024 in drought.

Work is continuing on the OBWB's new climate dashboard and includes about 30 indicators looking at water quantity. There will also be a section on water quality, Ms. Schira added. The data show that winter temperatures have increased for Vernon, Kelowna and Penticton compared to the 1951-1980 average. Both Vernon and Kelowna, shifted from being around -3.9 C and -3.3 C to now consistently having average temperatures above 0C. This shift in local climate conditions could have impacts on the local ecology and agriculture. Penticton was historically warmer at about -0.7 C so having temperatures around or above 0 C is not as significant a shift as for the other two cities.

The data is also showing a slight decrease in winter precipitation and a change in the type, with less snow and more rain. These changes are expected to affect the movement of water in the valley bottom, and could impact ecosystems and agriculture, she added.

“THAT the Water Science Specialist Report, dated Nov. 28, 2023, be received.”

CARRIED

6.6 Communications Director Report

Ms. Jackson gave an update on an OBWB survey that is under way in the valley. The survey will help determine the level of awareness among citizens about water issues, where they are getting their information, and potential outreach and engagement activities.

Due to the ongoing drought, the Water Board's Okanagan WaterWise program is continuing to promote indoor conservation efforts and preparing for outdoor efforts in the spring. Staff have also been talking with various utilities about messaging around the proper use of roof sprinklers during times of wildfire and drought.

Communications support has also been provided on the OBWB's calls to action on invasive mussels, with letters to senior and local governments and partners, and in responding to media.

“THAT the Communications Director's Report, dated Nov. 29, 2023, be received.”

CARRIED

7. IN-CAMERA

7.1 In-Camera session (under sec. 90(1)(k) and 90(2)(b) of the Community Charter

Come out at 12:09 p.m.

8. RISE AND REPORT

“THAT OBWB staff follow up with Province of B.C., District of Peachland and City of West Kelowna regarding the toxic spill on the Coquihalla Connector, on or around Nov. 22, and report back to board.”

CARRIED

9. CORRESPONDENCE

9.1 Letters to senior governments, cc'd to OBWB, re: invasive mussels from District of Summerland, Town of Osoyoos, City of Dawson Creek, Penticton and Wine Country Chamber of Commerce, Shuswap Watershed Council, Village of New Denver, CSRD.

- 9.2 And, two letters from B.C.’s Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Nathan Cullen and Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman, regarding the OBWB’s calls to action

The board voted to accept the letters.

“THAT the letters to senior governments, cc’d to OBWB, re: invasive mussels from District of Summerland, Town of Osoyoos, City of Dawson Creek, Penticton and Wine Country Chamber of Commerce, Shuswap Watershed Council, Village of New Denver, CSRD; AND, the letters from B.C.’s Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship Nathan Cullen and Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman, be received.”

CARRIED

10. NEXT MEETING

- 10.1 The next meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board will be Tuesday, Feb. 6 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m., online.

11. ADJOURNMENT

“THAT there being no further business, the regular meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board of Dec. 5, 2023 be adjourned at 12:16 p.m.”

CARRIED

Certified Correct:		
Chair		Executive Director