



**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD
HELD FEBRUARY 4, 2025, ONLINE**

PRESENT

Chair Blair Ireland	Regional District Central Okanagan
Vice Chair Doug Holmes	Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Director Rick Fairbairn	Regional District North Okanagan
Director Victor Cumming	Regional District North Okanagan
Director Bob Fleming	Regional District North Okanagan
Alt Director Shirley Fowler	Regional District North Okanagan
Director Wayne Carson	Regional District Central Okanagan
Director Sue McKortoff	Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Alt Director Subrina Monteith	Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Director Jeremy Fyke	Okanagan Water Stewardship Council (OWSC)
Director Bob Hrasko	Water Supply Association of B.C

REGRETS

Director Tim Lezard	Okanagan Nation Alliance
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STAFF

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

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears chaired the meeting, and called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

She respectfully acknowledged that we work on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded tm̓xʷúlaʔxʷ (land) of the syilx (Okanagan) people who have resided here since time immemorial. We honour and respect this land and the siwl̓k (water) which flows through the valley and connects us all.

2. ELECTION OF BOARD CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

2.1 Dr. Sears welcomed directors re-appointed for 2025.

Directors appointed to the board:

From **Regional District of North Okanagan**

Victor Cumming

Rick Fairbairn

Bob Fleming

Alternates – Christine Fraser, Shirley Fowler

Regional District of Central Okanagan

Wayne Carson
Charlie Hodge
Blair Ireland
Alternate – Kevin Kraft

Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen

Doug Holmes
Sue McKortoff
Alternates – Adrienne Fedrigo, Subrina Monteith, Matt Taylor

Water Management AppointmentsOkanagan Nation Alliance

Tim Lezard
Alternate – TBD

Water Supply Association of BC

Mr. Bob Hrasko
Alternate – James Kay

Okanagan Water Stewardship Council

Chair Jeremy Fyke
Alternate – Sheena Spencer

Dr. Sears requested nominations for chair. Dir. Cumming nominated Dir. Ireland. Dir. Ireland accepted the nomination. There being no other nominations, Dir. Ireland was elected chair.

Chair Ireland requested nominations for vice-chair. Dir. Holmes was nominated by Dir. McKortoff and accepted the nomination. There being no other nominations, Dir. Holmes was elected vice-chair.

“THAT Director Blair Ireland be elected as OBWB Chair and OBWB Director Doug Holmes be elected as Vice-Chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board for the year 2025.”

CARRIED

2.2 IN MEMORY OF RICK KNODEL

Directors acknowledged the passing of OBWB Director Rick Knodel, and shared memories of his time on the water board, noting that he will be greatly missed. Directors spoke of Dir. Knodel's humour, his positive impacts, his dedication to his community, and commitment to the water board.

3. INTRODUCTION OF LATE ITEMS

No late items.

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

“ THAT the agenda of the regular meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board of February 4, 2025 be approved.”

CARRIED

5. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board of December 3, 2024, held online.

“THAT the minutes of the regular meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board on December 3, 2024, held online, be approved.”

CARRIED

6. DELEGATION

- 6.1 Lisa Scott, Executive Director of the Okanagan and Similkameen Invasive Species Society (OASISS).

Ms. Scott presented to the Water Board about the 2024 work of OASISS's Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program, and OASISS's delivery of the OBWB's Don't Move A Mussel awareness campaign about the risks of invasive zebra/quagga mussels.

The presentation highlighted the outcomes and impacts of the Program in the Okanagan during 2024 – it's 12th year. This year focused on education and outreach, as well as lake monitoring for invasive mussels and clams. With one supervisor and two staff, OASISS conducted 986 public surveys at 15 boat launches, interacted with more than 5,200 members of the public at 24 community events, distributed AIS resources to 187 businesses, and presented to 677 youth at seven summer camps and four schools throughout the Okanagan. OASISS also conducted invasive mussel monitoring bi-weekly from June to September, during which time they collected 153 samples from eight lakes and one river, at 25 sites - with no mussels detected.

OASISS also found that 83 per cent of people surveyed had heard of the Don't Move A Mussel campaign, with the top sources of knowledge being OASISS, highway billboard signs, and signs at boat launches.

Ms. Scott was thanked for her presentation and exited the meeting.

7. STAFF REPORTS

- 7.1 Executive Director Report – Dr. Anna Warwick Sears

Dr. Sears updated the board on the new communications manager, who is scheduled to start February 18. Carmen Weld is joining the OBWB from the City of West Kelowna. With a background in journalism and local government communications, Ms. Weld brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the OBWB.

Dr. Sears provided directors with a courtesy notification from the auditors of the upcoming annual audit – the audit will begin in April. Directors received item 7.1.1, the Audit Planning Report. Findings from the audit will be presented to the board at the June meeting.

Dr. Sears also reported on the Mission Creek Water Use Plan planning process. This has been a priority for the water board for some time, especially for emergency response planning. The Plan is an opportunity to engage with the agricultural community and provide water users and the public with improved knowledge, and to reduce conflict during times of water scarcity in Mission Creek.

Following several months of project scoping and grant application development for the Mission Creek Water Use Plan update, the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) has submitted a grant application to the Real Estate Foundation, aligning the work with the Syilx Water Responsibility Plan and the Okanagan Similkameen Collaborative Leadership Table. The OBWB will closely collaborate with the ONA, especially providing support for the water science aspects of the project. Engagement will also include the City of Kelowna, Black Mountain Irrigation District, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, and other relevant stakeholders. This plan is an opportunity to collaborate with the ONA and to pilot the Syilx Water Responsibility Plan methodology.

"THAT the Executive Director's Report, dated January 29, 2025, be received."

CARRIED

7.2 Deputy Administrator Report - James Littlely

Mr. Littlely presented to the Board about the B.C. Invasive Mussel Defense Program (IMDP). The OBWB has been concerned about the lack of increase in funding to the Program and has been calling on the Province to increase funding to the Program since 2019.

To provide adequate funding for the IMDP total program costs and given the closer proximity and increased threat from quagga mussels in Idaho and golden mussels in California, staff recommends the Water Board call on the B.C. Provincial Government for increased funding of \$5.5 million to the IMDP in 2025 from all sources. This increase in funding would fund the potential future introduction of mandatory watercraft inspections, salary, travel, vehicles, lake monitoring, public outreach, equipment and maintenance, and further work on the Wildlife Act review.

Alberta has advanced its aquatic invasive species (AIS) prevention by establishing a politically led Task Force, including diverse stakeholders. Within six months, the Alberta AIS Task Force produced a comprehensive report recommending mandatory watercraft inspections, a sticker initiative, and enhanced early detection and rapid response measures, aligning with OBWB's previous advocacy. Key recommendations include a mandatory watercraft sticker program with dedicated revenue, mandatory inspections at provincial borders, and increased chemical treatment options through federal advocacy. The Task Force also proposes the implementation of an eDNA monitoring program, the development of invasive mussel-specific response plans, and the execution of training exercises. Following OBWB's August 2024 calls for collaborative AIS prevention with Alberta, including the creation of a Western Canada Invasive Mussel Free Zone, it is recommended that OBWB and the Okanagan-Interior Invasive Mussel Working Group reiterate these calls to the new B.C. Minister.

Recommendation:

THAT OBWB send a letter to Minister Neill, calling for the following actions:

1. \$5.5 Million funding to B.C. IMDP in 2025;
2. Mandatory inspections for all watercraft entering B.C.;
3. B.C. call on the federal government for resources and support;
4. B.C. work with Alberta to create a Western Canada Mussel Free Zone, including a politically led AIS Task Force;
5. B.C. work with Alberta to align penalties across provinces; and
6. Create clear policy to limit chemical use as a rapid response.

Directors requested some changes in the wording to the letter to Minister Neill.

"THAT staff be directed to send the letter to Minister Neill of WLRS re: Invasive Mussel Prevention with changes as noted."

CARRIED

Mr. Littlely also provided the board with an update on the Milfoil Control Program. He requested that directors remind local governments about the milfoil control program, and the need for the milfoil machines to access beaches, so when changes are made to lakefront parks or boat launches they account for OBWB's operational needs.

"THAT the Deputy Administrator's Report, dated January 27, 2025, be received."

CARRIED

7.3 Water Stewardship Director Report – Dr. Nelson Jatel

Dr. Jatel provided board directors with the regular update on the work of the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council (OWSC).

At the December 12, 2024 meeting, the OWSC received updates from the ONA's Tessa Terbasket, and Scott Boswell from the Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program, on the Watershed Responsibility Planning Initiative, which had achieved a significant milestone with a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) by 30 elected leaders, formalizing collaborative watershed governance centered on Indigenous collaboration and shared priorities like salmon restoration. On January 9, 2025, Jason Schleppe from Ecoscape Environmental presented to the OWSC on Habitat Conservation Banking as a tool to balance habitat losses and restoration, emphasizing its potential to streamline permitting and encourage proactive restoration, while acknowledging challenges in implementation and governance. The presentation highlighted the need for regional governments to adapt to the 2019 Fisheries Act framework and explore local opportunities like expanding the Mission Creek Habitat Compensation Bank. The upcoming February meeting will feature research on the economic, cultural, and environmental impacts of agricultural water use in the Okanagan, aiming to inform policy decisions and address water access challenges. The research will explore the economic value of irrigated agriculture and the opportunity costs of water use, while also addressing future water allocations and irrigation investments. The council continued to focus on collaborative, long-term solutions for watershed management.

The Board received an update on the ongoing Hydrometric Program. The annual Technical Advisory Committee meeting for the OBWB Hydrometric Program, held on December 10, 2024, reviewed updates on collaborative hydrometric data collection, station installations, and flood monitoring. Discussions centered on improving data sharing and quality control, with plans to install new stations on Mission Creek and upgrade data systems. Future goals include creating interactive maps, integrating data into provincial systems, and assessing the economic value of hydrometric data for regional water management.

Finally, Directors heard about the ongoing work on the Cyanobacteria Threat to Drinking Water Working Group. The Cyanobacteria Working Committee held its second meeting December 11, 2024, which focused on refining the project scope and tackling key water quality challenges in the Okanagan. Co-chaired by Ed Hoppe (City of Kelowna) and Krista Derrickson (Westbank First Nation), discussions focused on assessing sub-basin water quality, expanding nutrient monitoring, and developing a model for improved predictions. Members emphasized better data harmonization, enhanced monitoring systems, and advanced predictive modelling to manage cyanobacteria risks effectively.

***“THAT the Water Stewardship Director’s Report, dated January 27, 2025, be received.”
CARRIED.***

7.4 Water Science Specialist Report – Sandra Schira

Ms. Schira presented the board with a final summary of drought and precipitation in the Okanagan in 2024, noting that the year began with a sudden cold snap in January, which caused significant damage to Okanagan fruit trees and vines. Despite some summer rain, the Okanagan remained in drought throughout 2024 due to low snowpack, an early melt, and a prolonged July heatwave. Looking forward, seasonal forecasts for 2025 are indicating a wetter, warmer spring in the Okanagan, which could have impacts on Okanagan droughts this year.

***“THAT the Water Science Specialist Report, dated January 27, 2025, be received.”
CARRIED.***

7.5 Review of B.C. Greens – B.C. NDP Agreement and Mandate Letters Memo

Dr. Sears and Mr. Littley reviewed the ministerial Mandate Letters released in January 2025 from

the B.C. Greens and B.C. N.D.P for items pertaining to OBWB areas of interest to further advocate for watershed protection.

In the memo presented to the Board, there were 22 ministerial mandate items highlighted to have potential interest to the OBWB, including items of food security, agriculture, wildfire, provincial resiliency, B.C.'s energy transition and climate targets, Indigenous partnerships, maintaining environmental standards, and cross-government cooperation. It was noted that in the Hon. Josie Osborne, Minister of Health's Mandate letter that there was no mention of water as a public health concern, which is a concerning absence. Directors expressed their concern that no Mandate Letter by B.C. ministers mentioned Invasive Species.

"THAT the Agreement and Mandate Letters Memo, dated January 29, 2025, be received."
CARRIED.

8. NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No new or unfinished business.

9. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board will be Tuesday, March 4, at 10:00 a.m., online.

NOTE: Meetings of the Okanagan Basin Water Board are open to the public, and only closed for in-camera sessions as set out in the B.C. Community Charter. From time-to-time, the board will be holding its meeting online. If you are interested in attending an online meeting, please contact communications@obwb.ca for further details.

10. ADJOURNMENT

"THAT there being no further business, the regular meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board of February 4, 2025 be adjourned at 12:06 p.m."
CARRIED

Certified Correct:		
Chair		Executive Director