

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD
HELD SEPT. 5, 2025, AT THE ROTARY CENTRE FOR THE ARTS, 421 Cawston Ave, Kelowna, B.C.
V1Y 6Z1

PRESENT

Chair Blair Ireland
Vice Chair Doug Holmes
Alternate Director Shirley Fowler
Director Victor Cumming
Director Bob Fleming
Director Wayne Carson
Alternate Director Kevin Kraft
Director Sue McKortoff
Director Subrina Monteith
Alternate Director Jeremy Fyke
Director Bob Hrasko
Director Tim Lezard

Regional District Central Okanagan
Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Regional District North Okanagan
Regional District North Okanagan
Regional District North Okanagan
Regional District Central Okanagan
Regional District Central Okanagan
Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen
Okanagan Water Stewardship Council (OWSC)
Water Supply Association of B.C.
Okanagan Nation Alliance

REGRETS

Director Rick Fairbairn

Regional District North Okanagan

STAFF

Melissa Tesche
James Littley
Nelson Jatel
Carolina Restrepo-Tamayo
Carmen Weld
Christina White
Sandra Schira
Amanda Burnett

Executive Director
Chief Operating Officer
Water Stewardship Director
Office and Grants Manager
Communications Manager
Water Quality Project Manager
Water Science Specialist
Communications Coordinator

GUESTS

Sarah Sandholm
Dr. Michael Russello

UBCO – Associate Director of Development
UBCO – Researcher, Ecological and Conservation
Genomics Lab

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Chair Ireland called the meeting to order at 12:34 p.m.

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

2. INTRODUCTION OF LATE ITEMS

No late items.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

“THAT the agenda of the meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board of Sept. 5, 2025 be approved.”

CARRIED

4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

- 4.1 Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board held Aug. 5, 2025, held at the offices of the RDNO, at 9848 Aberdeen Road, Coldstream, B.C.

“THAT the minutes of the regular meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board on August 5, 2024, held at the offices of the RDNO, at 9848 Aberdeen Road, Coldstream, B.C., be approved.”

CARRIED

5. BOARD CHAIR REMARKS

There were no remarks.

6. DELEGATION/PRESENTATIONS

Dr. Michael Russello, Professor of Population & Conservation Genomics at UBC Okanagan, presented a proposal to create a rapid environmental DNA (eDNA) test for zebra, quagga, and golden mussels. eDNA refers to genetic material that organisms leave behind in their environment through skin, waste, or reproductive cells. The new tool would make it possible to test boats and water samples on-site, providing accurate results within minutes at low cost.

The project would involve UBC Okanagan, the University of California Davis, and Queen's University. At UC Davis, Dr. Andrea Schreier and her team have already shown that a genomic tool called SHERLOCK can detect fish species from eDNA in water. They are now adapting this same approach to target invasive mussels.

Queen's University, in Dr. Shelley Arnott's lab, would test how sensitive the tool is—specifically, how well it can detect very small amounts of mussel DNA. Because her lab raises invasive mussels under controlled conditions, they can carefully measure DNA levels to see how reliably the tool works.

The second phase of the project would focus on collecting samples from boats and watercraft, using methods such as vacuum filtration or surface swabs (similar to DNA testing at crime scenes). The goal is to find the quickest, most reliable method that avoids false negatives—results that mistakenly shows boats as mussel-free.

The combined eDNA test and sampling method would then be compared with the current gold standard: trained mussel detection dogs.

Dr. Russello presented a draft two-year budget of about \$500,000. This would cover a post-doctoral researcher, equipment, and travel between California, Ontario, and B.C.

The Board noted the potential for the project to transform boat inspections. If successful, this approach could provide inspections that are just as reliable as canine detection but at a fraction of the cost.

The Board also raised questions about commercialization, intellectual property, and funding, and directed staff to explore these issues further and report back at the next meeting.

“THAT staff be directed to explore a partnership with UBCO Conservation Genomics Lab to support this project, to explore other potential partnerships, and to return to the Board with recommendations.”

CARRIED

The Board thanked Dr. Russello for his presentation, and he exited the meeting.

7. STAFF REPORTS**7.1 Executive Director Report – Melissa Tesche**

Ms. Tesche provided a brief update to the Board. She noted that the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) had submitted a letter to the Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, expressing concerns about the province's new method for setting regional drought levels. The Board shared these concerns and expressed support for the ONA's position.

Ms. Tesche informed the Board that staff are preparing a submission to the Strategic Priorities Fund, formerly known as the gas tax grant program. The proposed project, developed in consultation with the University of Waterloo and the Okanagan Nation Alliance, aims to modernize and apply the Hydrology Model across all 18 Okanagan sub-basins, beginning with a pilot in Mission Creek, to support future water use planning. The submission will require a Board motion of support, which will be circulated to Directors for the October meeting.

“THAT the Executive Director's Report, dated Aug. 27, 2025, be received.”

CARRIED

7.2 Chief Operating Officer Report - James Littlely

Mr. Littlely provided the Board with an update on invasive mussel prevention efforts. He reviewed recent amendments to the Wildlife Act and noted that the changes offer flexibility for developing mandatory watercraft inspection regulations. However, he cautioned that provincial staff are currently facing financial and staffing capacity challenges that could delay implementation. He and Ms. Tesche are scheduled to meet with provincial officials later in the month to advocate for progress on this file.

He also informed the Board that the new milfoil harvester, a custom-built Aquarius HM620, is scheduled to arrive on Monday. The final cost of the machine is approximately \$422,500, which will be drawn from the milfoil reserve fund.

“THAT the Deputy Administrator's Report, dated Aug. 25, 2025, be received.”

CARRIED

7.3 Communications Manager Report – Carmen Weld

Ms. Weld provided a brief update to the Board, noting that the standings in the Make Water Work Community contest had changed significantly since her memo was issued. Osoyoos overtook Armstrong in the final week of the contest to claim the title of Make Water Work Community Champion.

She also reported that she and Ms. Schira had been working closely on drought bulletins throughout the summer, and that another bulletin had been released earlier in the week.

The Board asked for staff to prepare a briefing note ahead of the upcoming UBCM so they can be prepared to discuss the OBWB's concerns with the new regional drought rating system, should the opportunity arise.

“THAT OBWB staff be directed to prepare a briefing note for Board Directors attending the upcoming UBCM conference, outlining key talking points regarding the Province's new drought level system and its disconnect from on-the-ground conditions.”

CARRIED

"THAT the Communication Manager's Report, dated Aug. 26, 2025, be received."
CARRIED.

7.4 Water Science Specialist Report – Sandra Schira

Ms. Schira reported to the Board that the end of August experienced a heat wave, with August temperatures warmer overall, though still varied. The heatwave over Labour Day weekend was significant, with Lytton, B.C. experiencing the hottest recorded temperature in Canada this year.

Regarding drought, precipitation was within the normal range for the month. However, a year-to-date analysis reveals a relatively dry year. Intermittent rainfall has prevented the drought from becoming as severe as in previous years, but conditions remain dry. As a result, the province raised the drought level in the Okanagan from 0 to 2.

According to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), warm weather is likely to continue, although their models remain inconclusive. Okanagan Lake models indicate low water levels, which could be a normal seasonal pattern that has shifted earlier than usual.

"THAT the Water Science Specialist Report, dated Aug. 25, 2025, be received."
CARRIED.

8. NEW AND UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No new items.

9. CORRESPONDANCE

No correspondence attached.

10. IN CAMERA

No in-camera session held.

11. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board will be Tuesday, Oct.7, 2025 at 10:00 a.m., at the offices of the Regional District of the Okanagan Similkameen.

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.

12. ADJOURNMENT

"THAT there being no further business, the regular meeting of the Okanagan Basin Water Board of Sept. 5, 2025 be adjourned at 1:35 p.m."
CARRIED

Blair Ireland, Chairperson

Melissa Tesche, Executive Director