

### Memorandum

**To:** Mayor and Council, City of Kelowna  
**From:** Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director  
**Date:** December 12, 2007  
**Re:** Okanagan Basin Water Board Delegation

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board is pleased to appear as a delegation at the December 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of Kelowna City Council. We would like to update you on our programs and answer any questions about our work.

Programs delivered by the Water Board are funded through property taxes levied on all residents within the Okanagan watershed and include the Eurasian Watermilfoil Control Program, the Sewage Facilities Grants Program, and the Water Management Initiative. The Water Board represents and supports the collective interests of local governments in the Basin on regional water issues. We would appreciate your comments and input on Water Board programs, particularly with respect to sustainable water strategies.

#### **Eurasian Watermilfoil**

This program was established in the early 1970s to reduce the impact of milfoil growth on the revenues of the local tourist economy and recreation activities. The control program uses harvesters and rototillers to reduce the cover of weeds so that they do not interfere with public enjoyment of lakes. Priority areas for control are designated by local governments. In the Kelowna area, weed removal occurs annually along the lakeshore from Hot Sands Beach to the El Dorado Hotel. In the summer, we harvest the swimming area of the Apple Triathlon.

#### **Sewage Facilities Grants**

This infrastructure grant program was established to address water pollution from sewage discharges into the Okanagan mainstem lakes, and provides funds for extension of community sewer to areas on septic. The program complements provincial infrastructure funding, and improvements to sewage treatment since the inception of the program have reduced phosphorus inputs by over 95%. The Water Board has recently initiated a Master Wastewater Management Plan for the basin, which will consolidate present and future infrastructure needs and provide the basis for a program review.

### **Water Management Initiative**

The three Regional Districts of the Okanagan Basin approved this initiative to address water sustainability concerns throughout the valley, given increases in population, potential effects of climate change, and the perceived impact of water problems on the region's economy. This program was established in 2005 with a three-year term and a cap on annual funding (FY 2006-08). Components of the initiative include:

The Okanagan Water Stewardship Council. Made up of 27 water professionals and stakeholders, the mandate of the Council is to provide technical advice to the Water Board. A broad range of interests are represented including the Water Supply Association, Interior Health, the Cattlemen's Association, UBC-O, Regional Planners, the Ministry of Environment and others. The Council is now reviewing the Okanagan's key water concerns and potential solutions in order to make recommendations for an Okanagan Sustainable Water Strategy.

The Okanagan Water Supply and Demand Study. This study is evaluating current and future water needs and supplies on a basin-wide scale and will support future water licensing decisions. The last comprehensive water supply study took place in 1974. The Water Board has leveraged more than \$1,000,000 in cash from the Ministry of Environment and the federal Gas Tax Fund, and over \$400,000 of in-kind contributions from partner agencies for this effort, using \$300,000 in Water Board funds. The Water Board represents local government's interests by Co-Chairing the steering committee and the working group leading the study.

Water Conservation and Quality Improvement Grants. These grants award up to \$30,000 for projects that promote beneficial water management practices. In 2006 and 2007, the City of Kelowna received funding to conduct Sensitive Habitat Inventory Mapping on six Kelowna creeks and for Wetland Inventory Mapping. Other groups receiving funds within the Kelowna area were the Science Opportunities for Kids Society, with a project to develop teaching curriculum for the Okanagan Waterscape Poster; the Kelowna Joint Water Committee, with a groundwater protection plan; the Environmental Education Centre, with a water conservation exhibit; Black Mountain Irrigation District, with real-time hydrometric monitoring project and Water Use Plan for Mission Creek; and UBC-Okanagan, with an economic analysis of drought risk management by Okanagan farmers.

Coordinated Water Planning and Research. There are dozens of water-related research, conservation and policy planning efforts ongoing in the Basin. These range from groundwater contamination risk-analyses to community mapping projects and snowpack surveys. The Water Board has taken a coordinating role, helping planners and researchers work together more effectively and reduce duplication. This allows us to discover information gaps, identify funding opportunities, and provide reliable data for decision makers.

Water Information and Communication. There are already many excellent water management programs underway in Okanagan communities, but there is often little communication to share local successes. In November, the OBWB convened water conservation professionals throughout the Basin to discuss strategies and ways to better coordinate programs. Ideally, efforts like the City of Kelowna's landscape and irrigation standards, or the City of Penticton's water audit program can be customized to local needs and replicated throughout the valley.

## Okanagan Basin Water Board Strategic Vision

“Providing leadership to protect and enhance quality of life in the Okanagan Basin through sustainable water resource management.”

### Water in Context

There is only one water in the Okanagan – snow, rain, lakes, streams, groundwater, water for fish or for drinking, wastewater, stormwater, and irrigation are all connected by the hydrologic cycle and by our shared use. The Okanagan has the one of the lowest per capita water supplies in Canada. Wide fluctuations in precipitation swing us between extremes of drought and flood. In this fragile environment, we need healthy ecosystems to protect the health of Okanagan communities and water sources. Within the next few decades, both water quality and water supply will be impacted by a rapidly growing population and the effects of global climate change. Meeting these challenges takes basin-wide vision and action – our environment, quality of life and regional economy depend upon it.

### Who We Are

The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) was established by BC legislation in 1970 to resolve critical water issues at the scale of the entire watershed. The OBWB has representatives from the three Okanagan regional districts, the Okanagan Nation Alliance, the Water Supply Association of BC and the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council – a broadly-representative stakeholder group established by the Board to provide independent science-based advice on water issues. The OBWB strives for consensus decisions and Directors have equal-weighted votes. Programs are supported through tax assessments on lands within the Okanagan watershed. *Our vision is to have a fully-integrated water system, meeting the needs of residents and agriculture while supporting wildlife and natural areas.*

### What We Do

The OBWB provides the following essential functions:

- **Implementing basin-wide programs** for watermilfoil control, wastewater infrastructure funding, water research and management – benefiting all Basin residents
- **Advocating and representing** local needs to senior government planners and policy makers – protecting Okanagan interests
- **Providing science-based information** on Okanagan water to local government decision makers and water managers – for sustainable long-term planning
- **Communicating and coordinating** between government, non-government, universities and businesses – increasing the effectiveness of water projects and research
- **Building funding opportunities** by providing leverage grants, securing external dollars and identifying cost-sharing partners – expanding local capacity

### Structured for Success

The OBWB bridges the water interests of all Okanagan jurisdictions, and our emphasis on equity reduces conflicts between urban and rural needs. The OBWB's semi-autonomous structure gives flexibility to respond to issues or opportunities, allowing alternative approaches and funding partnerships. With a new emphasis on water management, the OBWB is comprehensive and action-oriented. Multi-stakeholder technical advice from the Council strengthens the OBWB's decisions. By building communication networks, the OBWB promotes collaboration among governments, non-government and private sectors.

### **Acting on the Vision**

Although the valley has seen many changes in recent years, actions taken now to create agreements, policies and infrastructure will carry us to a future with greater options and security. The OBWB and Okanagan Water Stewardship Council are working on a series of initiatives to support sustainable water resource management, including:

- **Sustainable Water Strategy** – a broad analysis of Okanagan water issues, including recommended actions to support environmental values, source area protection, coordinated water conservation, agricultural water policy, and the regional economy, reporting on the State of the Okanagan Basin.
- **Water Supply & Demand Project** – the first comprehensive water budget in 35 years, this analysis combines water science with computer technology and scenarios of population growth and climate change to evaluate current and future water needs and build our information infrastructure.
- **Sharing Information to Increase Efficiency** – communities that work in isolation may replicate work of neighboring areas, and miss learning new approaches and best practices. The OBWB is developing ways to share successes through workshops, websites and other channels – bringing ideas and people together.
- **Metering and Monitoring** – best management needs best information on water use and the OBWB supports water metering and monitoring by all sectors. We are also leading BC with developing collaborative governance for stream flow monitoring, bringing together natural resource agencies with watershed groups and industrial users.
- **Water Use Plans** – the OBWB supports agreements for fair sharing of water between fisheries, agriculture and domestic users during water shortages. These are best developed for each drainage and brought together in the future as part of a basin-wide Okanagan Drought Plan.
- **Resource Mapping and Environmental Restoration** – healthy watersheds provide a range of functions that protect water quality and reduce erosion and flood damage. The first step is to assess waterways, lakeshores and other natural systems and then prioritize actions for remediation and restoration.

Okanagan water issues are diverse and complex with many layers of government, policies and divergent interest groups. The Province is now moving toward plan-based water legislation – developed by and for each region – to guide licensing decisions, harmonize policies, and provide protections for groundwater and source areas. The OBWB initiatives above lay the groundwork of science and information needed to develop an Okanagan Water Management Plan.

*One Watershed, One Water*