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NEWS RELEASE

LAUNCH OF UNIQUE PROJECT PROMPTS VALLEY MAYORS TO CHALLENGE RESIDENTS TO “MAKE WATER WORK” IN THEIR YARDS

Kelowna, B.C. – With the warm weather, lower-than-average valley water levels and sprinklers already turning on, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and its WaterWise program have announced the kickoff of their annual outdoor water conservation campaign – “Make Water Work” – with an earlier-than-normal start date. And, it began with an announcement at Bylands Nursery in West Kelowna about a unique new program.

The OBWB’s Okanagan WaterWise, the Okanagan Xeriscape Association (OXA) and Bylands Nursery have developed a “Make Water Work Plant Collection,” unveiled today. And, thanks to interest from garden centres throughout the Okanagan, this collection of low-water, xeriscape plants will now be available to residents from Armstrong to Osoyoos.

“This project is incredibly special,” said Corinne Jackson, OBWB Communications Director, in charge of the WaterWise program and Make Water Work. “Here we have a local government with a campaign to encourage water conservation, reaching out to non-profit, industry, & retail, asking them to help develop & deliver a program that will help make the change we need in our valley – a shift in thinking about how we landscape our yards.

“This began with a conversation two years ago. It’s a great feeling to see this finally launch. The extensive partnership that has developed is amazing,” added Jackson.

Make Water Work was first launched in 2011, with local government and water utility partners throughout the Okanagan, to reduce outdoor water use in summer. The valley has less water available per person than anywhere in Canada but has some of the highest use in the country. And, 24% of all water used in the Okanagan is used on household lawns and gardens with a lot of it wasted. Since 2011, there has been an effort to raise awareness, provide tips to make water work more effectively, and a contest to encourage people to “Take the Pledge” online at www.MakeWaterWork.ca and be entered to win a WaterWise upgrade to their yard. Now, with the launch of the plant collection, residents are being offered a tangible way to make a difference every time they choose to purchase plants for their yard.

Looking back at the process, OXA Executive Director Gwen Steele is very pleased. “Watching the traffic on our online ‘Plant Database,’ we knew people were interested in xeriscape plants but what was missing was clearly labelled plants and designated areas in valley garden centres. This is what this project addresses.”

Reviewing the list of participating high-profile garden centres – “it’s very impressive,” added Steele. Among the businesses that will be carrying the plant collection are:

- Blue Mountain Nursery in Armstrong
- Swan Lake Nurseryland in Vernon
- Kel-Lake Greenhouses in Lake Country
- Art Knapp in Kelowna
- Bylands Garden Centre in West Kelowna
- GardenWorks Penticton, and
- Sandhu Greenhouses in Osoyoos

As far as the partners know, this is the first program of its kind in Canada, something Mike Byland, Sales Manager for the nursery is proud to be involved in. “It’s exciting to be part of such a unique project,” he said adding it fits well with Bylands’ ongoing commitment to water conservation.

“Water is a finite resource. We all have to be committed to using it responsibly,” he said. In fact, Bylands was the first nursery in Canada to recycle water, installing three water recycling ponds allowing them to re-use about one third of their water use.

“Each year we expand our drip irrigation and continue to invest in more modern water-conserving systems,” added Byland. “This plant collection project aligns very well with our interests.”

In kicking off this year’s MWW campaign, OBWB Chair and West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater took the pledge at www.MakeWaterWork.ca, challenged fellow mayors from around the valley to do the same and encouraged residents to also join the effort. In addition to saving water, he noted there is a fun element where the community with the most pledges will be named “Make Water Work Champion.”

And, the prizes are even better this year thanks to contest partners KelownaGardens.com, ProSource Irrigation, Bylands and, new this year, Eco-Turf offering more than \$8,000 in prizes, including a Grand Prize of a WaterWise yard upgrade worth \$6,000.

Looking around at the dry hills of the Okanagan, Findlater noted “this year’s campaign may take on a more important dimension than in past years.

“This year’s low snow pack and early freshet means we will have to pull together in this valley. Hopefully things will improve but we don’t know if this is a one-year anomaly or something we can expect in future years, similar to what is happening south of us in California.

“Either way, it makes sense to start adopting WaterWise habits now.”

Those joining Findlater at today’s announcement and taking the pledge included: Lake Country Mayor James Baker, Peachland Mayor Cindy Fortin, City of Kelowna Deputy Mayor Tracy Gray, Armstrong Mayor Chris Pieper, Summerland Acting Mayor Erin Trainer, Osoyoos Acting Mayor Carol Youngberg and Heidi Frank – Oliver’s Chief Administrative Officer, defending the community’s 2014 “Make Water Work Champion” title.

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The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) was established in 1970 as a collaboration of the three Okanagan regional districts – North, Central and Okanagan-Similkameen. The board provides leadership for sustainable water management by protecting and enhancing the quality of life and environment in the Okanagan Basin, from Armstrong to Osoyoos.