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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **OKANAGAN BASIN WATER BOARD URGES RESIDENTS TO CONSERVE IN FACE OF DROUGHT**

**Kelowna, B.C.** – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) is urging residents to do their part to conserve water and help prevent a provincial declaration of Level 4 Drought in the Okanagan.

“We are at ‘Level 3 Drought.’ The entire south coast and southern Vancouver Island is in Drought 4, and watersheds around us are under review,” noted Anna Warwick Sears, OBWB Executive Director. “We’re appealing to the public to observe the Province of B.C.’s request for a 30% reduction in water use.”

Many Okanagan utilities are still on odd/even watering days, added Sears. For residential users to conserve 30%, that can be achieved by moving to 2-days/week watering restrictions. And if you must water outdoors, make water work more efficiently and effectively. Find easy but effective tips at [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca).

“The Water Board and its Okanagan WaterWise program, together with local governments and utilities throughout our valley, launched its annual outdoor water conservation campaign, ‘Make Water Work,’ early this year, recognizing that the forecast was for a long, hot, dry summer,” Sears added. “The year began with a low snowpack, and then an early spring melt, and then our June ‘monsoon season’ never came. Now, with low stream flows and warm water temperatures we are hearing of fish kills. We are also seeing the effects of dry conditions with an upsetting number of fires.”

Looking out at the dry hills of the Okanagan, Sears tackled some of the questions that come up when people are asked to conserve. One is that people look at the Okanagan and other lakes and can’t believe a water shortage is possible. This is referred to as the ‘Myth of Abundance.’ The fact is that Okanagan Lake only fills 1.5 metres per year in a normal year, and that’s what water managers have to work with – ensuring enough water for fish, crops, institutional use, open space and residents.

“We can’t take out more than is replenished,” said Sears. “To do that would be to ‘mine’ the lake, creating problems like the ones faced by communities that rely on Lake Mead in Nevada where the levels have been drawn down 125 feet below full-pool and water intakes are being drilled lower and lower.”

Another question that often comes up is farmers who water 24/7. Some have little choice if they have a large farm. In that case, it may take a full 24 hours to water each part of their field, she explained. And, many farmers are doing a good job – having done the work to determine how much water is needed, how often. Some farmers have installed drip lines, but for others this is cost-prohibitive, or doesn’t work for certain crop types like forage. And while much of our water goes to crops, it should be recognized that

water for food contributes to food security and our economy. Most farmers are supplied by irrigation districts that work with their customers and monitor their use.

Residential outdoor watering accounts for the 2nd highest use of all water in the Okanagan (24%). At the same time, there is less water available per person in the Okanagan than anywhere in Canada. “Considering most of the residential water used outdoors is used on lawns – which are mostly for cosmetic use – this is where you and I can make a difference and Make Water Work,” said Sears, offering tips.

- Water plants. Not pavement.
- Put water on the nightshift. Water between dusk and dawn.
- Don’t mow. Let it grow. Leave lawn 5-8 cm (2-3 inches) tall.
- Leave grass clippings as mulch.
- Top dress with compost; and
- Change out some lawn for drought-tolerant turf and/or native and low-water variety plants.

**Residents can find more information, as well as local water restrictions for their community by using the drop down menu on our Make Water Work website at <http://www.makewaterwork.ca/tips>.**

As an added incentive, Okanagan residents are invited to Pledge to Make Water Work at [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca) for a chance to win over \$8,000 in prizes, including a Grand Prize of a \$6,000 WaterWise yard upgrade.

At Level 3 Drought the province requests local governments and water utilities eliminate filling of public fountains and watering of public parks, gardens, medians, and other similar areas. If the province declares a Level 4, they will start cutting off water licensees which could lead to the kind of conflicts we saw in 2003, Sears concluded. “By all of us doing our part and voluntarily reducing our water use now, we can reduce the risk of mandatory reductions in our valley.”

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