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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD LAUNCHES WEBSITE, HELPING VALLEY PREPARE FOR FUTURE FLOODING

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board held an online news conference today to introduce new valley-wide flood maps and launch the “[Okanagan Flood Story](http://www.OkanaganFloodStory.ca)” website, helping residents and local governments understand flood concerns and prepare.

“We’re very excited to see this launch, which happens to coincide with Emergency Preparedness Week,” said OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears. “Flooding is part of the Okanagan’s history, but we’ve long talked about the need for new flood maps, at the Water Board table and at local government tables as well. These maps are important to help residents, planners, developers and others, make the best decisions possible, ensuring we minimize our flood risk.”

The pressure for federal flood map funding began after the 2013 Calgary floods, explained Sears. Ottawa was getting its program in place when the Okanagan was hit with historic flooding in 2017. With funds then available, the OBWB worked with communities around the valley to apply for funding and coordinate mapping efforts.

“This website, at www.OkanaganFloodStory.ca, is the culmination of two years of flood mapping in our valley. And it’s very clear that through state-of-the-art modelling that the potential for flooding is increasing with climate change. These maps are the first step in understanding and reducing our flood risk,” Sears added.

In addition to the new flood maps, visitors to the website will find historical information on flooding in the Okanagan, how climate change is effecting flooding, as well as how residents and local government can reduce risk, prepare, respond, recover, and more.

“It’s definitely something we all need to pay attention to, as local government and as residents – we need to address this together,” added Sue McKortoff, OBWB Chair and Mayor of Osoyoos. “As we like to say at the OBWB, we are all part of ‘One valley. One water.’ What happens in one part of the valley, affects the next. And we all have a responsibility as Okanagan residents to build flood resilience.

“I know people like to live down on the water with the views, and be able to jump in their boats. But you know, there’s a reason why Osoyoos Indian Band didn’t build on the water. They knew what would happen,” McKortoff noted. “It’s too easy for people to be guided by their hearts and not their heads, until it’s too late. Having updated mapping, and concrete information that says ‘here are the best practices,’ will help residents make the right decisions, as well as local governments and even provincial and federal officials.”

Indeed, Sears explained, these new maps will inform how our lakes are managed by the province, and can assist local governments determine where dikes, roads or bridges need to be reinforced, and where building codes need to be updated to reduce property damage.

“As the weather warms, and as mountain snow melts and we head into the Okanagan’s freshet season, the roll-out of this project couldn’t be more timely. We hope people will find the website and the information it contains useful,” added Sears.

This project was made possible with \$2.5 million in funding for LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and flood mapping. LiDAR funding was provided by Emergency Management BC (EMBC). Flood mapping was

funded by EMBC, Public Safety Canada under the National Disaster Mitigation Program, and from the Province of B.C. administered by the Union of B.C. Municipalities under the Community Emergency Preparedness Fund.

The project was managed by the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and supported by the Regional Districts of North Okanagan, Central Okanagan and Okanagan-Similkameen, and the Government of B.C., and was undertaken by Northwest Hydraulic Consultants Ltd.

Numerous local and First Nations governments also supported the project: Okanagan Nation Alliance, City of Armstrong, Township of Spallumcheen, City of Vernon, District of Coldstream, District of Lake Country, City of Kelowna, City of West Kelowna, District of Peachland, District of Summerland, City of Penticton, Town of Oliver, Town of Osoyoos, Splitsin First Nation, Okanagan Indian Band, Westbank First Nation, Penticton Indian Band and Osoyoos Indian Band.

The OBWB wishes to thank all the partners that helped in the launch of this project.

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