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NEWS RELEASE

OKANAGAN WATER BOARD AND AQUA FORUM DEMONSTRATE TECH AGILITY IN FACE OF COVID-19 - PIVOT EVENT TO 100% VIRTUAL

Kelowna, B.C. – The Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and partner Aqua Forum are moving ahead with the BC 2020 AquaHacking Challenge Semi-Final, this Saturday, March 21, transitioning the in-person “science fair” style event to an all-digital platform. The event will be live-streamed on the OBWB’s Okanagan WaterWise Facebook page at 5 p.m. PST at www.facebook.com/OkWaterWise/.

“We are very pleased to be able to bring this event to the public,” said OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears. “It’s Canada Water Week and we are looking forward to sharing this innovative program with the community – celebrating water and profiling young professionals who are working on solutions to some of our greatest water challenges.”

According to Aqua Forum Chief Operating Officer Dominique Monchamp, “We are charting new waters with this virtual event and embrace the opportunity. The semi-final has always been one of our important in-person milestone events, but with the current COVID-19 outbreak and the importance of following the direction of health officials, we had to switch gears – and do so quickly. Facebook Live streaming and other video conferencing technologies allow us to still hold the event, and do so in a safe and responsible manner. This is an opportunity to leverage technology in the current context and continue to focus on important environmental programs and outcomes.”

The B.C. Challenge launched in October with the announcement of five critical freshwater issues for student-led teams to focus on. Chosen by local water leaders, are: contaminants in storm water, outdoor water use, flood damage and risks, invasive zebra and quagga mussels, and access to potable water in Indigenous communities. In response, some 22 teams from across B.C., as well as other provinces, have signed up to pitch their tech-solutions to a panel of expert judges, including representatives from RBC, Real Estate Foundation of B.C., Mitacs, Accelerate Okanagan, Piscine Energetics, Ecoscape Environmental, and others. Each team will make their pitch online Saturday afternoon, with judges then teleconferencing and discussing their scoring.

At 5 p.m., the public is invited to join the event online for the announcement of the five semi-finalists and hear the pitches that put them on top. These teams will then compete for \$50,000 in cash prizes and a spot in a business incubator, taking their solution from idea to market. The finals will be held in June.

“We are very excited about this event – for many reasons,” added Monchamp. “AquaHacking began in 2015, focusing on the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Basin. This is the first time the challenge is taking place in B.C. and the first fully virtual semi-final event. The interest in B.C. has been phenomenal. With the province’s focus on clean tech and climate change, this is what we were hoping for. It really feels like the time has come for young tech talent to play a role in helping address current water issues.”

“These water issues aren’t going to go away unless we use our best minds and top technology to address them. We are very excited to see the range of solutions developed by these teams,” added Sears.

The B.C. AquaHacking Challenge is one of three programs being held across Canada this year. Other challenges are taking place in Winnipeg and Atlantic Canada.



Aqua Forum was founded by the De Gaspé Beaubien Foundation with the goal of connecting youth and young professionals with an interest in freshwater issues, clean-tech innovation and entrepreneurship, with mentors who could help them launch real-world solutions. The AquaHacking Challenge is the organization's flagship program. After five years of programming in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Basin, the program is now coast to coast thanks to funding from RBC Foundation.

Supporters and funders of the B.C. AquaHacking Challenge include: RBC Foundation, Real Estate Foundation of BC, Teck Resources, IBM, Mitacs, Ovivo and Lavery Lawyers.

Advisory committee partners include: Central Okanagan Economic Development Commission, Okanagan Sustainability Leadership Council, Urban Systems, City of Kelowna, Purppl, Okanagan Nation Alliance, and the B.C. Ministry of Environment and Climate Change and Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology – Cleantech Planning and Innovation Branch.

Academic partners are: UBC Okanagan and UBC Vancouver, Okanagan College, Simon Fraser University, BC Institute of Technology, University of Victoria and University of Northern B.C., as well as several universities in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec.

Implementation partners are: Hackworks, Waterlution and the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise education and outreach program.

For more on the B.C. AquaHacking Challenge 2020, visit <https://aquahacking.com/en/bc-2020/>.

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