

March 24, 2020

NEWS RELEASE

TOP FIVE TEAMS ANNOUNCED IN B.C. AQUAHACKING CHALLENGE SEMI-FINAL

Kelowna, B.C. – It was fitting that the Okanagan Basin Water Board and Aqua Forum demonstrated their tech-agility as they played host to a water tech challenge on Sat. March 21 – conducted entirely online. Participants, including judges, mentors and others, logged in remotely to the B.C. AquaHacking Challenge 2020 Semi-Final to hear and see teams from across Canada pitch solutions to some of B.C.’s greatest water challenges, and to hear the announcement of the five finalists.

A total of 195 participants registered from post-secondary institutes across B.C., Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, forming 30 teams, of which 20 pitched at the semi-final. The issues they were tasked with hacking, as chosen by B.C. water leaders, were: contaminants in storm water, outdoor water conservation, flood damage and risks, invasive zebra and quagga mussels, and access to potable water in Indigenous communities.

The finalists are:

- **Atlantis** (from UBC Vancouver, University of Victoria and Simon Fraser University): Issue – flood risk. Solution: Interactive online platform makes flood risk information more accessible to the public, adaptable to changing climate scenarios, and able to integrate public sourced information.
- **Ozero** (Sherbrooke University - Quebec): Issue - invasive mussels. Solution: A technology to decontaminate ballast water in sport boats to prevent propagation of zebra and quagga mussels in freshwater.
- **Elite** (UBC Okanagan - Kelowna): Issue - stormwater contamination. Solution: A gravity-based filtration system that removes oil, dust and petroleum contaminants from water.
- **Hydrodynamic Labs** (UBC Okanagan - Kelowna): Issue - stormwater contamination. Solution: An engineering solution, adapted to the land contour, to collect debris, waste and sediment as it flows over urban landscape in times of high water events.
- **Agricultural Decision Support** (University of Victoria and Queens University - Toronto): Issue - stormwater contamination. Solution: A digital simulated platform that provides feedback to policy makers on the efficacy of farm incentives aimed at water conservation and nutrient management to protect water quality.

These teams will now compete for \$50,000 in seed funding and placement in a start-up incubator to further refine their solution and bring it to market.

“We are so thrilled about these five teams and about this very successful virtual event,” said Aqua Forum Chief Operating Officer Dominique Monchamp. “In the space of five days, a completely in-person science fair-style event with close to 100 participants, plus judges, mentors, advisory committee members, sponsors, plus the public, was transformed to be delivered entirely virtually. It is truly remarkable,” she added. “The reality of COVID-19 is devastating, and the commitment of those who helped make the semi-final a success demonstrates our resilience when we come together as a community.”

OBWB Executive Director Anna Warwick Sears agreed, adding “I was really moved by the pitches we saw. It was inspiring to see young people come together to make the semi-final happen under these



circumstances. Teams had to revamp their presentations to be delivered remotely and what they came back with was fantastic.

“Their proposals will make a difference in the Okanagan, helping us address the effects of a growing population and climate change, and the impacts these are having on stormwater, the spread of invasive mussels, and flood risk to our communities.” But these solutions have the potential to also help communities far beyond our valley, Sears added, noting the geographic diversity of the finalist teams. “It demonstrates that, although the issues chosen are big here, these are issues across Canada. And, we’re hopeful that teams that didn’t make it to the finals will continue to work on their solutions through alternate programs because we need solutions, and passionate and engaged youth are important in this effort.”

“Meaningful initiatives like those that focus on the health of our freshwater help us all stay grounded in these unprecedented times,” Monchamp added. “These finalists, and their innovative solutions, are the future of water management in Canada. We honour their creativity and commitment and are working now to ensure we see the B.C. AquaHacking Challenge through to the final, by leveraging technology with virtual events. Stay tuned!”

Find the announcement of the five final pitches on the OBWB’s Okanagan WaterWise Facebook page at https://bit.ly/BC-AH_semi-final_FBLive.

Special thanks to our funders: RBC Foundation, Real Estate Foundation of BC, Teck Resources, IBM, Mitacs, Ovivo and Lavery Lawyers.

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BACKGROUND & FAST FACTS

B.C. AquaHacking Challenge by the numbers:

76% of participants are undergraduates; 8% - young professionals; 7% - MSc students; 6% - college students; 3% - getting their PhD

Participants per water issue:

Stormwater contamination: 26%
Invasive mussels: 8%
Flood Damage and Risks: 23%



Outdoor Water Use: 26%

Potable Water in Indigenous Communities: 17%

- 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 Gaspe Beaubien Foundation to connect 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.

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

- Advisory committee partners: 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: 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/>.