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For Immediate Release

CRD Chair Margo Wagner reflects on 2017

Williams Lake, B.C. – Cariboo Regional District (CRD) Chair Margo Wagner delivered a year-end report at today's Board of Directors meeting in Williams Lake. The full transcript of her address follows.

"Members of the Board, Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take a moment to review the Cariboo Regional District's key accomplishments and successes for 2017. As your new Chair, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the hard work, perseverance and dedication of our past Chair Al Richmond. His leadership in 2017 and over his last nine years as Chair have significantly contributed to all I am about to outline. Thank you, Al, for the tremendous work you have done for the Regional District.

Reflecting back on this year brings a mix of emotions. It has been quite a year and it is hard to believe we are heading into a new year already. Our region has gone through a lot in this second half of the year, especially, but I firmly believe we have come through stronger, Cariboo Strong.

Looking back over the past year, our region can be proud of its achievements. How we not only responded and supported our communities through a fire season for the history books, but how we carried on in our regular business, building on our relationships, enhancing our services and seeking continuous improvement.

To start, two major recreation projects were completed this year in the Regional District, the West Fraser Centre arena in Quesnel and the West Fraser Aquatic Centre in Williams Lake. Both of these beautiful new facilities will provide excellent recreational opportunities for the area and will aid our efforts to retain and attract young families and professionals. I am proud to say both projects also have supported our economy through utilizing local trades and contractors.

The South Cariboo is also exploring new recreational opportunities through an expansion to the South Cariboo Recreation Centre. The project working group, which formed in 2016, worked with an architectural firm throughout this spring and summer to develop a concept design for the project. We look forward to taking another step forward with the project in the new year as it moves to public consultation.

Also on the South Cariboo Recreation Centre property in 100 Mile House, the Exeter Valley Nature Trail opened this spring. It is an accessible trail which brings us to a total of 19 low mobility wilderness trails throughout the region. Plans are underway to continue to develop the Cariboo Chilcotin accessible trails network in the coming year.

Early in 2017, two new water projects started in the South Cariboo, a water treatment plant for the 108 Mile Ranch and a water system for 103 Mile. Despite delays from the wildfires this summer, both projects are making good progress and we expect completion in early 2018.

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In March, we hosted the final open houses for the Lac La Hache and South Cariboo Official Community Plan updates. As OCP updates are community driven processes, we were pleased to see the communities' participation and engagement in these updates. Both OCPs are going through final reviews and edits before their adoption.

As Chair of the Cariboo Chilcotin Regional Hospital District, I was pleased to attend two special announcements in March at both the Cariboo Memorial Hospital in Williams Lake and the G.R. Baker Memorial Hospital in Quesnel. We were pleased to see steps forward on upgrades of these facilities and we continue to advocate for progress with our new provincial government.

In May, former Chair Al Richmond led a B.C. local government delegation to China with our local Mayors. The trip was very successful as the group formed new relationships and explored potential for collaboration. We have seen ripple effects of the trip this year through subsequent Chinese delegations to the Cariboo, a summer camp opportunity in China for Cariboo students, the Canim Lake Dancers' invitation to perform in China and the recent progress on the proposed flight school in Williams Lake. It truly was a great opportunity for the region.

This year, the CRD attended the Electoral Area Directors and Local Government Leadership Academy Forums in Vancouver in February and the North Central Local Government Association Convention and Annual General Meeting, which were held in Terrace in May. In June, four Directors also attended the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Conference in Ottawa. Delegates and their partners were able to attend some great workshops, business sessions and, of course, some spectacular entertainment and social events. I would like to take this opportunity to again thank the many volunteers who dedicated their time and efforts to put on these conferences. The hospitality which was offered to delegates and their partners was second to none.

On June 8 and 9, the CRD Board of Directors attended the first of our two annual Board on the Road events. About 150 residents attended the Board on the Road BBQ in 100 Mile House with all the proceeds going to the 100 Mile House Lions Club. The second Board on the Road event was scheduled for Electoral Area J in September, but had to be cancelled due to the wildfires. We look forward to visiting Area J for our Board on the Road event this coming June.

July 6 was a day to remember this year as it marked the first day of our wildfire response. The CRD's Emergency Operations Centre was open for 77 days, with the final evacuation alert lifted on September 20. With a total of 211 wildfires in the Cariboo this summer, we issued 149 evacuation order and alert changes. 60 percent of our region's population was on alert or order this summer; 48 percent were evacuated.

I would like to take a moment to thank all the CRD staff who worked tirelessly in our EOC this summer on behalf of our residents and to all the local governments and organizations who sent us additional staff and resources. Furthermore, thank you Board members for all that you did and for how you went above and beyond in support of your constituents. I can't mention everyone for fear of missing someone, but I would also like to specifically thank all the first responders, Volunteer Fire Departments, Search and Rescue Departments and Emergency Social Services volunteers for their tremendous service this summer.

Considering the magnitude of the emergency we faced, I am very thankful there were no fatalities or major injuries. That being said, many people faced and continue to face significant impacts from the wildfires – economically, physically, emotionally and mentally. We also cannot forget the impacts for those who lost their homes or other structures. Our thoughts are with our residents this holiday season, recognizing it will be a difficult time for many.

Following the wildfires, we moved into the recovery phase this fall. We hired a Recovery Manager, who has been an invaluable support to residents in regards to recovery resources, services and support, and we launched a post-wildfire community consultation process. With 24 meetings spread throughout the Regional District, we received a significant amount of feedback from the 700 residents who attended and we learned a lot about their experience and concerns. In addition, we have conducted internal debriefs with those who worked in our EOC this summer, with the Board of Directors and with other agencies we worked alongside in the emergency response. We look forward to reviewing the consolidated reports from these debriefs, our public consultation meetings, the Facebook live event and the survey and determining steps forward to improve our emergency response for the next time.

This fall, we welcomed John MacLean as our new Chief Administrative Officer. We look forward to working with you, John, and are pleased to have you back at the Cariboo Regional District again. Many thanks to our former CAO, Janis Bell, as well. We cannot thank Janis enough for her decades of service and her leadership with the Regional District.

At the end of September, the Cariboo Regional District Board of Directors attended the annual Union of British Columbia Municipalities convention and AGM which took place in Vancouver, B.C. Throughout the convention the CRD met with provincial ministers and staff, attended workshops and spoke to CRD resolutions, which all received endorsement. Our main focus at all our meetings was wildfire recovery and that is something we continue to advocate for with the provincial government.

In the midst of the recovery efforts this fall, we also celebrated the grand opening of the new McLeese Lake library building. We look forward to the grand opening of the new library building in Interlakes early in 2018.

Some other highlights from 2017 have been:

- assisting numerous non-profit groups and supporting funding requests for community initiatives through our grant writing program;
- being named as a 2016 Climate Action Community;
- applying to a number of different provincial and federal funding programs such as Destination BC's Co-operative Marketing Partnerships program, Northern Development Initiative Trust, BC Rural Dividend fund, and Co-op Community Spaces for a total of approximately \$350,000; and
- receiving approximately \$1.7 million from the Community Works Fund to support green initiatives and energy efficiency projects.

As we look forward to 2018, our 50th anniversary year, let's not forget how far we have come and the challenges and issues we have overcome or resolved along the way. Part of the reason for this report is to remind you of our accomplishments, and to compliment you on your successes.

This year has been challenging one and I would like to thank all the Board members and staff for your dedication, perseverance and support throughout 2017.

I would also like to thank all the residents of the Cariboo – you have done us proud. Thank you for your patience and understanding through the emergency response. Thank you again to the many volunteers, businesses, and first responders who gave of their time and resources to serve the region. Neighbours helped neighbours and this emergency brought people together as nothing else could.

While creating new partnerships, enhancing services, undertaking capital projects, informing the public and responding to residents' needs is what building this region is all about; only with your support can we achieve our goal of Building Communities Together.

Thank you.”

Media Contact:

Emily Epp, Manager of Communications

Cariboo Regional District

250-392-3351 or 1-800-665-1636

eepp@cariboord.ca