

News

Local mayors urge residents to conserve water

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Municipal leaders from around the Okanagan gathered Wednesday to urge residents to change their water use habits and conserve water as the region known as one of the driest in Canada once again appears headed for drought conditions this year.

Politicians from nine municipalities—from Osoyoos to Vernon and everywhere in between—pledged to take a Make Water Work Challenge and change their own water use habits heading into another Okanagan summer.

"Water is our most precious resource and even though we do see a lot of it out there, it's a finite resource," said Peachland mayor Cindy Fortin.

"Our behaviours today are what our children are going to learn down the road and hopefully down the road being water wise will be the norm for future generations."

Local politicians from every municipality stood in front of what's known as the UnH2O Xeriscape Demonstration Gardens at the H2O Centre in Kelowna and pledged to conserve water by changing their own personal water-use habits: Leaving grass to grow longer and using more xeriscape plants, including 54 plants in the Make Water Work Plant Collection, plants that need less water and are perfect for the dry Okanagan climate.

"I dread summer now because of the wildfire season. We always seem to have some area being evacuated. It feels like summer now and we need to be concerned about this."

—West Kelowna Mayor
Doug Findlater



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—Lake Country
Coun. Rob Geier

"Last year I took out 400 square feet of lawn and will replace more this year with Make Water Work plants," said Gail Given, Kelowna city councillor.

"I encourage residents to make water work in your homes and yards by planting materials appropriate for our area and make adjustments to your water use."

The Okanagan is coming off a year where the provincial government enacted a level 4 drought advisory and this year's warm spring and early fire season are pointing towards another year of extremely dry conditions in the area.

However, despite the message being hammered down by local politicians as well as the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) and municipalities, all of which are enacting some sort of water restrictions or conservation plans, the message doesn't appear to be getting through to everyone.

"(I) wish they wouldn't attack water so much cause (sic) I use it as bug spray. I spray off the bugs with it every day and every day I water. Screw the district. I would much rather have water sprayed on my plants than pesticide," commented Sharon Smith on the Kelowna Capital News Facebook page, responding to a water conservation tip.

Still, politicians felt the message is getting through and were hopeful that the leadership shown by

the OBWB as well as the municipalities will push people to think twice before over-using water.

And several put the hopes on the younger generations that are the homeowners of the future.

"Hopefully the message is getting out there," said Lake Country Coun. Rob Geier.

"Young people are the ones you can mould in elementary and high school.

"They are the ones who will have the helm and they won't even look to (green) lawns, they will look to xeriscaping.

"(Municipalities) need to take a lead role. We can't go planting and having sprinklers going all the time and expect residents to reduce water as well."

Several municipalities have moved to water metering systems in the past years while others have already enacted water restrictions on residents this year.

But with bylaw enforcement mostly done unless a complaint is lodged, it's up to individuals to change their water patterns and think of future water preservation needs.

"If we don't get the rains in May and June that we want and we need, not only will we see our reservoirs and lakes drawn down, but if you get two or three years of that, you're in trouble," said West Kelowna Mayor and OBWB chair Doug Findlater.

SEE MAYORS A4

news

Findlater: 'I dread summer now because of the wildfire season'

MAYORS FROM A3

"I dread summer now because of the wildfire season. We always seem to have some area being evacuated.

"It feels like summer now as we need to be concerned about this."

The Make Water Work challenge lays out several ways residents can conserve water.

Go to makewaterwork.ca to take the challenge and to find plenty of information on conserving water as well as on the Make Water

Work plant collection.

"This year the collection has been expanded to include 54 plants, including beautiful grasses, perennials, shrubs and trees, perfect for the dry Okanagan climate," said Corinne Jackson, OBWB communications director.

"As well, two new garden centres have joined the program, bringing the total to nine, ensuring nearly all Okanagan residents can walk into a garden centre in their community and find the Make Water Work collection."

Residents who take the challenge will be entered to win several prizes including a grand prize of a water wise yard upgrade with \$6,000.

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WATER CONSERVATION TIPS

Stretching our water further

- Is your water productive?

Put water on the nightshift. Water between dusk and dawn. Putting water to work during the coolest part of the day prevents evaporation. A good rule of thumb is between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. Check with your water utility for specific watering restrictions in your area.

- Is your water working efficiently?

Put water where it's needed. Don't let water waste time, effort and money. It should sprinkle your lawn or garden, not pavement.

- Is your water working effectively?

Leave grass two to three inches tall (five to eight centimetres). Don't mow. Let it grow. Water stays longer when grass is longer. Leaving your grass longer slows evaporation from the soil making it work more effectively.

- Leave grass clippings as mulch. Leaving grass clippings on your lawn helps feed the lawn and retain moisture, requiring less water and reducing evaporation.

- Aerate your lawn and top dress with compost. Aerating the lawn in early spring or fall improves water penetration. Water also works best



There are ways to ease the pressure on your use of water and still have an attractive garden without a blanket of grass.

with organic products like compost which minimize over-fertilizing and help prevent stormwater pollution.

- Does your water work well with others?

Pair water with plants suitable to our dry climate. Okanagan water works best when paired with plants suitable to our dry climate: drought-tolerant turf, and native low-water variety plants. Visit the Okanagan Xeriscape Association's Plant Database (okanaganxeriscape.org/db/) for an extensive listing of WaterWise plants for the Okanagan.

- Does your water simply stand around?

One inch a week will do. Most

lawns need just 2.5 cm (one inch) of water per week—about the depth of a tuna can. Watering deeply and less often promotes deep, healthy root growth. If you're watering deeply but not seeing results the problem may be inadequate topsoil. Try top dressing with half an inch of compost, then over-seeding for a thick and vigorous lawn.

- Check sprinkler heads. Notice brown spots? Water needs supervising. Sometimes sprinkler heads break, or plants grow around the sprinkler head, preventing effective water use. Check sprinkler heads and make necessary fixes to ensure they're working right.

SEE TIPS A5

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Access to Make Water Work plants

Participating garden centres offering plants in the Make Water Work collection.

North Okanagan

Blue Mountain Nursery Company
1871 Pleasant Valley Rd., Armstrong,
Phone: 250.546.8181
E-mail: info@bluemountainnursery.ca
Swan Lake Nurseryland
7920 Highway 97, Vernon
Phone: 250-542-7614
Email: admin@myswanlake.com

Central Okanagan

Kel Lake Greenhouses
4351 Shanks Rd., Lake Country
Phone: 250-868-1889
Art Knapp Kelowna
1994 Springfield Rd., Kelowna
Phone: 250-860-5633
Email: artknapp.kelowna@shaw.ca
Bylands Garden Centre
1600 Byland Road, West Kelowna
Phone: 250-769-7272

South Okanagan

GardenWorks Penticton
670 Duncan Avenue W., Penticton
Phone: 250-492-5703
Email: penticton@gardenworks.ca
Grasslands Nursery
3615 Gartrell Road, Summerland
Phone: 250-494-4617
Email: grassnursery@telus.net
Sagebrush Nursery
7556 Island Road, Oliver
Phone: 250-489-8898
Sandhu Greenhouses
9707-128 Ave., Osoyoos
Phone: 250-495-2676
Email: info@sandhugreenhouses.com

Water conservation tips to reduce reliance on excessive watering

TIPS FROM A4

- Install water-saving irrigation products. Save money on your water bill by using high efficiency irrigation, like drip or microjet, for shrubs and gardens.
 - Collect and use rainwater. It's free. Rain barrels collect fresh, naturally soft and chemical-free water that is great for container plants, flower beds, and food gardens.
- For more water conservation tips online, go to makewaterwork.ca.

MISSION CREEK RESTORATION

Flood protection objectives being met

The first phase of Mission Creek's restoration is already providing flood protection and environmental benefits.

"On April 22, Mission Creek had an early freshet peak flow of about 67 cubic meters per second," said Don Dobson, project engineer for the Mission Creek Restoration Initiative.

"As that flow increased and the water level rose, water gradually overtopped the stream banks where the dike had been removed, allowing water to slowly flow across the floodplain."

As the water level

across the floodplain increased, water started to flow back into the main creek channel near the west end of the project area.

"The project performed as expected with water flowing onto the expanded floodplain near the upstream end of the project, and flowed back into the creek near the west end," he said.

"The new dike had water up to the toe of the dike and contained the water on the floodplain as planned."

Whether there will be further flow onto the floodplain this spring will depend upon the flows

over the remainder of the freshet.

"It's great to see freshet flows entering the newly expanded floodplain," said project coordinator Steve Matthews.

"The river's energy is already starting to develop a more naturally functioning floodplain and riparian area, providing the opportunity for deposition of fine sediments that would typically remain within the creek channel.

"This will improve in-stream gravel quality for spawning kokanee."

The high water levels will also initiate development of riparian

wetland areas including the two amphibian ponds constructed during vegetation plantings.

"All of these project outcomes will contribute to improved habitat for Mission Creek fish populations and a wide range of wildlife species

utilizing the riparian zone," added Matthews.

For more up-to-the-minute information about MCRI visit the website missioncreek.ca and look for the Phase-1 Mission Creek restoration project fact sheet along with a video.

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