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Okanagan mayors urge water conservation despite flood

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For weeks now the Okanagan’s main issue has been too much water. Okanagan residents have been fortifying their homes against rising lake levels.

However, even as flooding concerns continue, mayors from up and down the valley gathered in Kelowna on Wednesday to call on residents to conserve water this

summer.

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Officials acknowledged the irony, but say that doesn't change the fact that the region's water fortunes could change.

Chair of the Okanagan Basin Water Board, Tracy Gray, said the region is on track for a warmer than normal summer.

"As we get into the heat of August and September, we need to make sure that we have enough water then in order to get us through," said Gray.

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"We could be worrying about the water level in our reservoirs come September," added West Kelowna mayor, Doug Findlater.

Our water habits this year could also have long-term implications.


"When we think about water and drought...we actually have to think a couple of years out," said Findlater.

"We have to think if we draw down our reservoirs this summer and we have a low snow pack winter next year, are we going to be in trouble next year?"

In the short term, conserving water will also take the pressure of local water treatment systems.

Flindlater said the water treatment plant in West Kelowna is being taxed as ground water seeps into pipes and residents pump out flooded crawl spaces.

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So despite the soggy start to the year, officials are encouraging homeowners to take conservation measures.

Those include watering lawns at night, making sure sprinklers are directed at plants not roads or sidewalks and waiting longer to mow. They recommend a 2 to 3 inch lawn.

Drought unlikely this summer

The province said the “likelihood of a significant drought in the Okanagan is low this year,” but summer temperatures are expected to be somewhat higher than usual.

“The most recent June 1 snow bulletin indicated the snowpacks in [the] Okanagan were 228 per cent of normal. Snow will gradually melt over the next month or two, recharging streams, lakes and groundwater. Water levels will remain higher than normal well into the summer in the Okanagan,” said provincial water stewardship manager Valerie Cameron.

“However, if there is an extended period of hot dry weather combined with higher than normal water usage, there may be some stress on water supplies.”

The province said even though the drought risk is low residents should still continue to conserve water as usual.

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