



TOP STORY

Drought declared for Valley

Steve MacNaull [Jun 21, 2019](#) Updated Jun 21, 2019



Don't be doing too much of this now that a drought has been declared in the Okanagan.

Special to The Daily Courier



It's official — we have a drought.

This week, the B.C. government announced a Level 3 drought (very dry) in the Okanagan as below-normal snowpack and scant rain have left Okanagan Lake low and the ground parched.

B.C. measures aridity in four levels: normal, dry, very dry and extremely dry.

The last time there was a Level 4 drought (extremely dry) in the Okanagan was 2015.

Normal and dry tend to be no big deal.

However, when Level 3 (very dry) is proclaimed, the government amps up drought warnings and citizens are forced to pay attention to restrictions on lawn watering.

"Even with the rain we got earlier this week, it is dry out there," City of Kelowna utility services manager Kevin Van Vliet said Friday.

"It creates challenges for a water utility. We have to think not just about this year, but into the future to make sure we don't drain Okanagan Lake. It's true, the lake is a huge reservoir, but only so much water goes into the lake each year — about a metre-and-a-half worth. If we exceed that metre-and-a-half any given year, we mine into the base and it never recovers. Beaches and docks will go dry as the level of the lake goes down."

Okanagan Lake is the source of water for the Kelowna utility.

McCulloch Reservoir, which supplies Southeast Kelowna, did not fill up this spring.

Duteau Creek Reservoirs is the source of water for most homes, businesses and farms in Vernon, Coldstream and Electoral Areas B and C of the Regional District of North Okanagan. Those reservoirs didn't fill up either this spring, and the regional district is looking at drawing more water from Kalamalka Lake to make up the shortfall.

But that could leave Kalamalka Lake short.

It all goes back to winter snowpack in the mountains surrounding the Okanagan.

The snowpack was only about 75% of normal this winter, meaning when the weather warmed, less melted snow than usual found its way into creeks that flow into reservoirs and lakes.

Usually, the Okanagan can depend on some significant spring rain to add to the snowmelt to top up creeks, reservoirs and lakes.

But May precipitation was record low and even if there was rain earlier this week, June is shaping up to be dry, too.

"The snow is all gone now and the long-term forecast is for a hotter and drier than normal summer," said Dave Campbell of the River Forecast Centre.

"Right now, we have low levels in creeks, rivers and lakes that we would usually see in late July or early August," Campbell said. "Worst-case scenario is that forecast comes true and we have a real challenge. Rain can help alleviate the situation, but we'd have to get a lot of it."

With such conditions, the City of Kelowna is looking at reducing overall water usage by 10% with what it calls Stage 1 water restrictions.

The city implements Stage 1 every year, but it's taken on more urgency this year with the Level 3 drought announcement.

Stage 1 water restrictions mean automatic underground irrigation can run only between midnight and 6 a.m. up to three days a week.

Those days are Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for properties with odd-number addresses and Wednesday, Friday and Sunday for even-numbered properties.

No watering is allowed on Mondays.

The same odd-even schedule applies to property owners with manual lawn sprinklers and spring-loaded nozzles on a hose.



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However, watering hours are between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m. or 7 p.m. to midnight.

"Stage 1 is really about raising awareness about unnecessary watering," said Van Vliet.

"Water only on your assigned days and times, and don't do anything like wash your driveway with the hose."

Technically, straying outside your watering timetable could result in a \$50 fine. But the city prefers education and the worst you're likely to get is a reminder card on your door.

Stage 2 water restrictions aim for a 20% reduction in overall water use with a move to two-day-a-week watering restrictions and a possible \$200 fine for breaking the rules.

Stage 3 allows only one day of watering per week, and the potential fine jumps to \$400.

The fine remains at \$400 in Stage 4, but it's considered a "total crisis," according to Van Vliet, and all outdoor watering is prohibited except for watering livestock and fruit trees.

Greater Vernon hasn't instituted any official water restrictions but warns they may be on the horizon.

In the meantime, people are urged to conserve water.

The Valley-wide water conservation campaign [MakeWaterWork.ca](#) suggests many ways to save the resource as supplies dwindle.

Since outdoor watering accounts for about a quarter of all water use, the campaign targets lawn and landscaping sprinkling.

[MakeWaterWork.ca](#) says lawns and landscaping really need only 2.5 centimetres of water a week, which can be delivered with a 20-minute sprinkling between dusk and dawn.

Cutting grass a little taller, leaving lawn clippings as mulch, aerating lawns and top dressing with compost also help retain water and reduce the need for sprinkling.



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From your own Kelowna be on community?

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- No, many citizens are not walking down the street.
- No, there are too many owners at every corner.

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