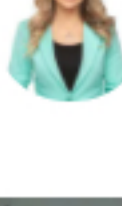


ENVIRONMENT

# Okanagan bracing for what could be a severe drought this summer



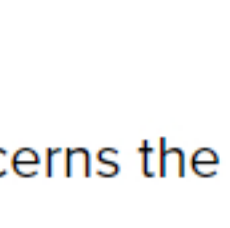
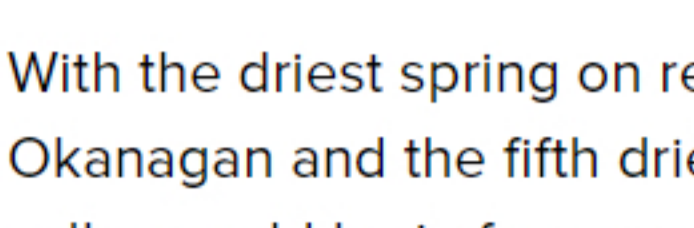
By **Klaudia Van Emmerik** · Global News

Posted **June 8, 2021** 5:50 pm · Updated June 9, 2021 10:42 am



Water providers and managers in the Okanagan are bracing for what could be a severe drought this summer. With the driest spring on record so far in many parts of the valley--there are fears water may be in short supply over the next few months. As Klaudia Van Emmerik reports, residents are being urged to conserve water especially with their outdoor use of the resource. – Jun 8, 2021

VIDEO LINK: <https://globalnews.ca/news/7932985/okanagan-bracing-for-what-could-be-a-severe-drought-this-summer/>



With the driest spring on record so far in both the Central and North Okanagan and the fifth driest in the South Okanagan, there are concerns the valley could be in for some serious drought conditions this summer.

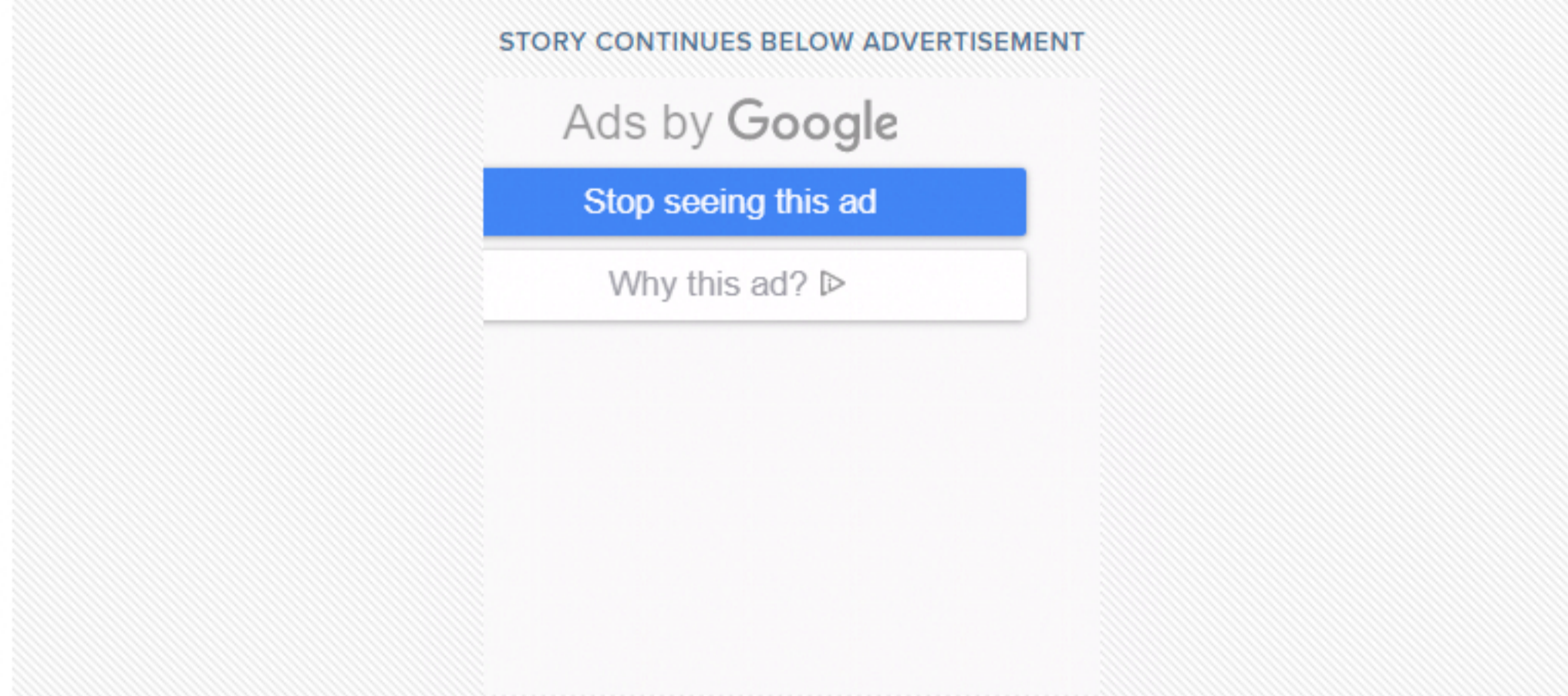
“The Canadian drought monitor right now is predicting and projecting a moderate drought in the Okanagan,” said Global meteorologist Peter Quinlan.

“I do anticipate that the drought levels will likely worsen to potentially severe or extreme drought level for the Okanagan.”

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Quinlan said that since April 1, there has been very little moisture in the valley.

“We’ve just had tinder-dry conditions,” Quinlan said. “Only 13.5 mm of rain reported at the Kelowna airport when normally there’s about 85. That’s just about 16 per cent of normal for that spring period.”



The dry weather, combined with high temperatures, could result in water being in short supply.

“It’s greatly concerning because we need to ensure that we have enough water in our streams, not only to meet domestic needs, the needs of residents but also the farm crops, so agriculture and make sure that there is enough come fall when the salmon are coming back to spawn,” said Corinne Jackson with the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB).

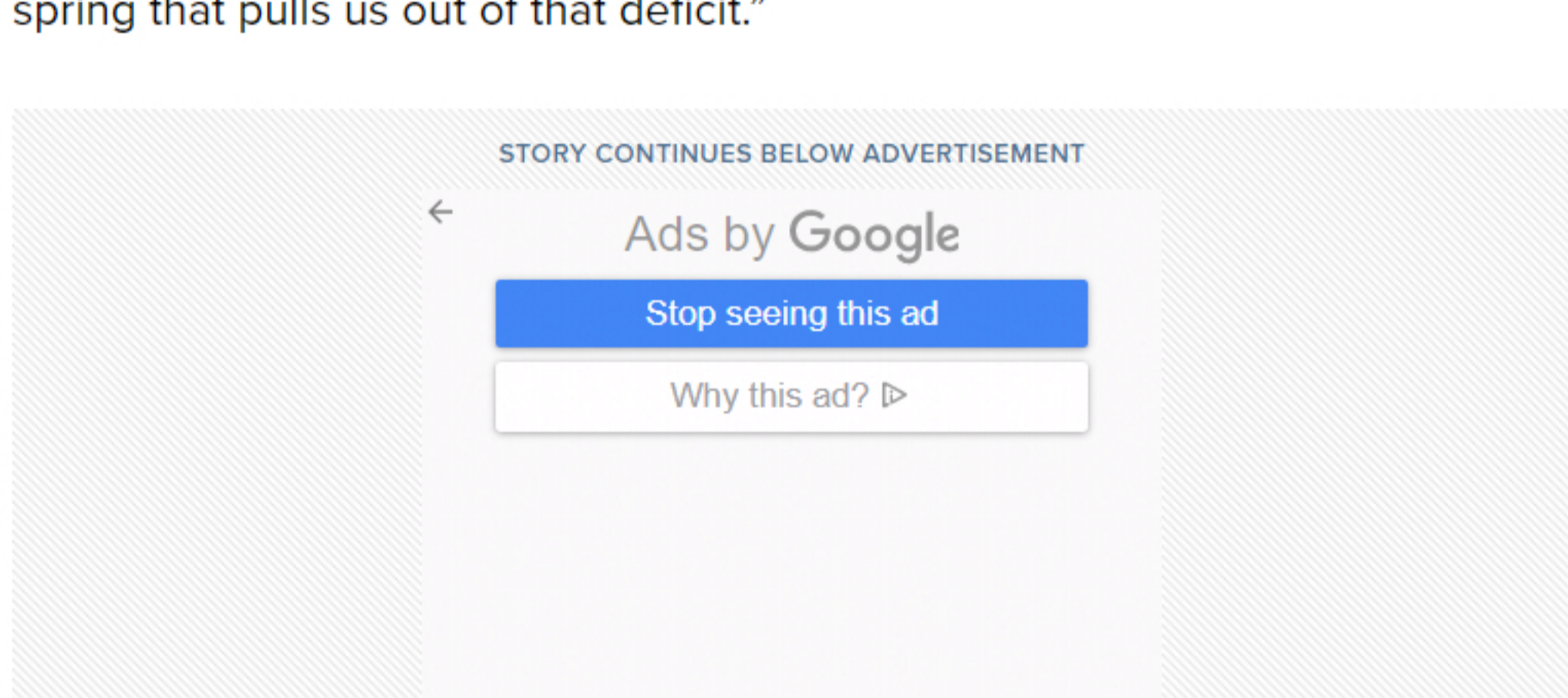


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The OBWB is watching the situation closely and working with its provincial counterparts, as well as water utilities, to implement drought protocols if needed.

“We’re really hoping that the June rains are going to come. That is our monsoon season,” Jackson said.

“We are really hoping that we are going to have some significant rains this spring that pulls us out of that deficit.”



Jackson is urging residents to do their part and monitor their water usage closely, especially outdoors.

“Just making sure that you have set your irrigation so that it is watering at the right times,” she said, “that it is watering plants and not pavement because we still see that in the Okanagan and there are a number of tips that we were asking residents to take.”



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At Frind Estate Winery in West Kelowna, winemaker Eric von Krosigk is also watching the weather conditions closely.

“It can be a very significant impact not just for us, for any farmers,” he said. “It just really depends on how long the drought goes on.”

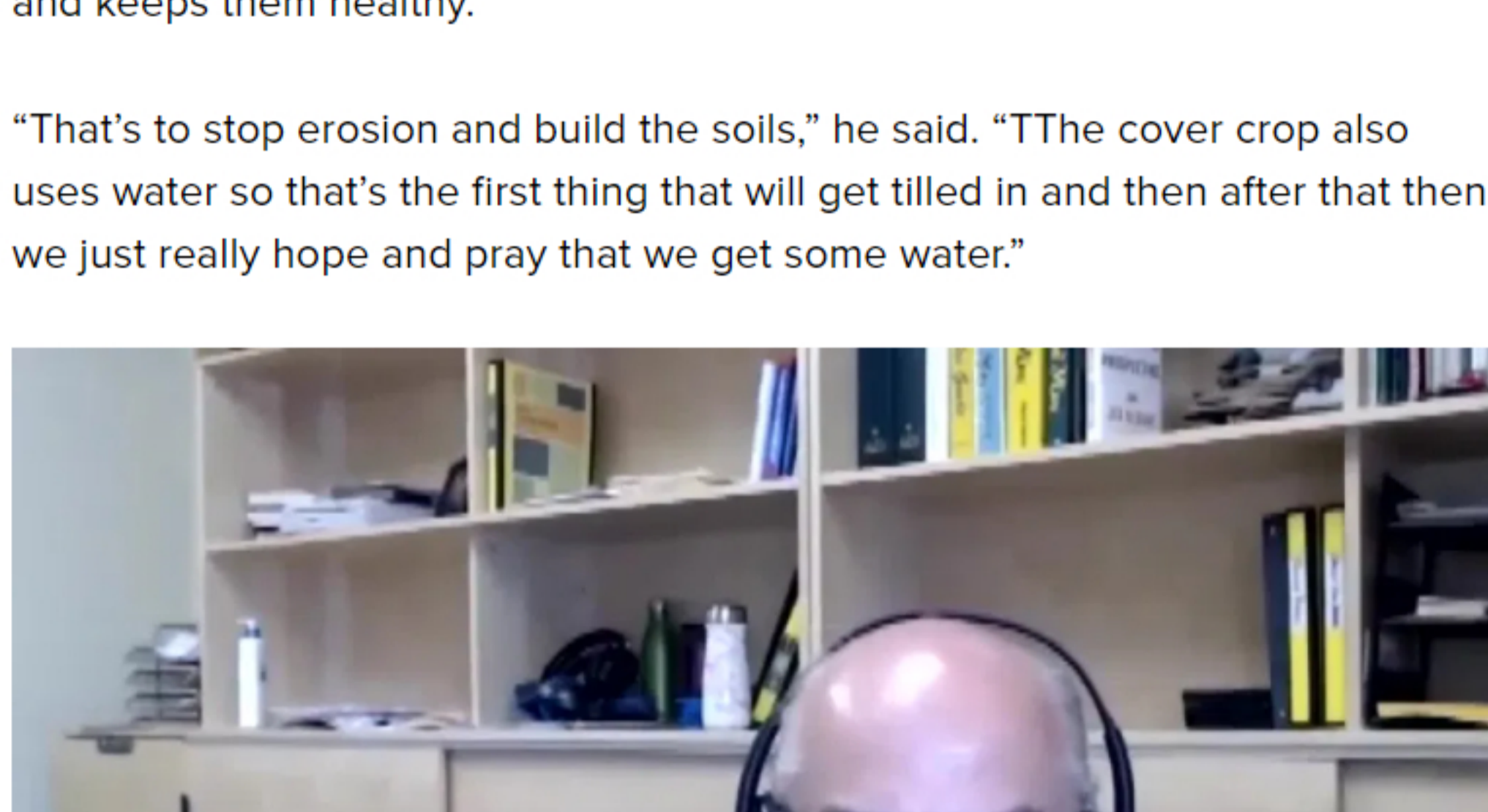
He said while dry conditions can be good for grape development, they aren’t invincible and a lack of water would have damaging effects.



“First thing that happens with grapes anyways ... is that they drop their grapes,” von Krosigk said. “The plant has a protective mode, they shrivel up the grapes and then the leaves start yellowing up from the bottom up.”

He said if things get really bad, the cover crop would be the first thing to see a reduction in water — not ideal because the cover crop is what feeds vines and keeps them healthy.

“That’s to stop erosion and build the soils,” he said. “TThe cover crop also uses water so that’s the first thing that will get tilled in and then after that then we just really hope and pray that we get some water.”



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Von Krosigk said that as the Okanagan grows, so, too, should water infrastructure to accommodate population growth.



“We’ve not seen anything done to the water infrastructure and whether they need to raise the dam to catch more runoff water or whatever might be, but there’s a big concern,” von Krosigk said.

With so many lakes spanning the valley, many believe the water supply is abundant, but Jackson said that is deceiving.

“The fact is that our lakes are only managed to hold one-and-a-half metres to prevent flooding in springtime,” said Jackson.

“So if they do not fill that one and a half metres because we don’t have the precipitation and the lake has been drawn down, well then we have some problems.”

Click [here](#) to learn more about water conservation and to check what current water restrictions are in place in your area.



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