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Peachland Mayor Cindy Fortin is hoping her community will defend its previous Okanagan WaterWise contest titles this summer. (Contributed)

Residents encouraged to be waterwise as Okanagan Lake below full pool

Visit www.MakeWaterWork.ca and pledge to make water work better

BARRY GERDING / May. 29, 2022 8:00 a.m. / NEWS



With the May long weekend marking the unofficial start to summer, Okanagan mayors have been posting videos on their social media feeds this week, encouraging residents to pledge to make water work better this summer.

It's all part of the "Make Water Work" campaign, an outdoor residential water conservation campaign delivered by the Okanagan Basin Water Board's Okanagan WaterWise program in partnership with local governments and utilities in the valley.

"Although it's been unseasonably cold in our desert community and throughout the valley this spring, we're launching the Make Water Work campaign recognizing that people are getting their irrigation ready, garden centres are busy, people are in their gardens, and it's always better to set things up right in the first place than to have to go back and fix things," explained Sue McKortoff, OBWB's chair and mayor of Osoyoos.

"To be honest, this cool-weather has been a relief. Given last year's drought and wildfires, and that the Okanagan's snowpack has improved but is still below normal, I'll be happy to see a slow snowmelt.

"In fact, with Okanagan Lake still below full pool, cooler weather and a little more rain would help us bounce back from last year's drought."

Of course, it's too early to know for sure what the Okanagan can expect, so it's best to be prepared, added OBWB communications director Corinne Jackson, who manages the Okanagan WaterWise program and its Make Water Work campaign.

"The fact is that the Okanagan has one of the highest rates of water use in Canada, with less available per person, and our population continues to grow. Drought or no drought, that's good enough reason to consider our water use," Jackson said.

"Make Water Work is aimed at tackling the second largest use of water in the Okanagan, residential outdoor use, and creating healthier and more resilient neighbourhoods."

Residents are encouraged to visit www.MakeWaterWork.ca and pledge to make water work better and invite friends and family to join them.

Pledges include:

1. Water lawn between dusk and dawn.
2. Water plants, not pavement.
3. Never mow grass low. Let it grow.
4. Choose plants suitable to our dry climate.
5. Tune-up my irrigation.
6. Aerate my lawn and top dress with compost.

As incentive for the pledge, and to add some fun, residents will be eligible to win one of two \$500 WaterWise yard upgrades.

The pledge also goes towards helping their community win bragging rights as Make Water Work Community champions.

On the Make Water Work website residents will find tips to get the most from the water they use, and ways to convert their landscape to be more WaterWise.

This year the campaign is featuring the native plants in its Make Water Work Plant Collection, recognizing the growing interest in local plants that will naturally do well in this climate, and provide benefits to local pollinators and other wildlife.

"As part of a 'pandemic project,' our family transformed part of our yard from neglected lawn to xeriscape using the Make Water Work Plant Collection, and it held up great through last year's heat dome and drought. We've welcomed a variety of fabulous insects, birds, and more, that would not have visited otherwise," Jackson said.

To help residents get started, the Make Water Work campaign has partnered with garden centres throughout the valley to carry the plant collection.

Partners include: Blue Mountain Nursery in Armstrong, Nicholas Alexander Landscaping and Swan Lake Market & Garden in Vernon, Ace Hardware in Lake Country, Better Earth Gardens in Kelowna, GardenWorks in Penticton, Sagebrush Nursery in Oliver and Sandhu Greenhouses in Osoyoos.

The campaign is also working with ProSource Irrigation to promote WaterWise irrigation product.