

## WATER CONSERVATION

**Level two drought declared in the Okanagan****Valley is extremely dry despite June precipitation**

The Daily Courier Staff

It's dry out there and likely to get drier, says the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

A late 2022 drought, an early freshet, recording-setting heat in May and declining streamflows have led the provincial government to move the region to a Level 2 drought, said the board in a drought bulletin last week.

The bulletin provides a valley-wide perspective on current drought impacts on water supply, fish, agriculture, fire-fighting and domestic use, and response.

Despite recent cooler temperatures and a few showers, the Okanagan is extremely dry, the bulletin said, and water supplies are limited and stressed.

The snowpack in the Okanagan region has melted and some areas of the region have had lower than average rainfall this spring. Streamflows are now very low and water temperatures are increasing, which can be deadly for fish.

The bulletin said Okanagan water providers should closely monitor water supplies and customer demand, and begin to communicate before drought

conditions get worse. All communities and individuals should be using water wisely and comply with watering restrictions issued by their communities or suppliers.

Water licence holders on streams and wells who are not customers of local water utilities should follow provincial government water use guidelines, said the bulletin.

Fisheries biologists believe that the early freshet, warm temperatures, and lack of rain this spring are leading to an earlier than normal onset of low streamflows, and the bulleting noted that similar conditions in 2015 meant more than 90 percent of Okanagan Sockeye that entered the Columbia River died before reaching their spawning grounds. Sockeye, Chinook, Steelhead and Coho use Okanagan tributaries for spawning and rearing. These species need enough water in streams and aquifers to support spawning later in the year.

Okanagan streams and lakes are also home to resident Kokanee, Rainbow Trout and Whitefish. Low streamflows can prevent fish from reaching spawning and feeding areas, increase susceptibility to disease and predation, cause stranding, or fish kills due to low oxygen and high water temperatures.

Groundwater is also important for fish.

When high air temperatures warm surface water flows, groundwater upwelling in streambeds creates cool areas where fish can survive. Provincial staff monitor groundwater levels and will ask users to reduce water consumption if needed, the bulletin said.

Agriculture uses more water than any other activity in the Okanagan, but crops and animals need more water to survive in hot and dry weather. Farmers need to practice good water management to make sure water supplies last through the season.

The second largest use of water in the Okanagan is household lawns and gardens. The board's Okanagan WaterWise program launched its annual "Make Water Work" campaign in May, aimed at educating residents to conserve water and follow water restrictions in their communities. The campaign will run until early October, when water is still needed for fall harvest crops and fish are returning to creeks to spawn. Water is increasingly needed for fighting forest fires, the bulletin noted.

The drought bulletin is part of the Okanagan Basin Water Board's Okanagan Drought Response Strategy aimed at ensuring stronger communication and valley-wide co-ordination during a drought.

## NEWSBRIEFS

**Kelowna airport generated over \$51 million in revenue in 2022: Annual report**

Kelowna International Airport celebrated its 75th year of operation by generating over \$51 million in revenue in 2022. The information is contained in the City of Kelowna's 2022 annual report, released last week.

In 2022, the airport was awarded \$15 million in federal funding for infrastructure projects and \$3.7 million in provincial funding to build a childcare facility with space for 86 children.

The first plane took off on a grass runway from Ellis Field in the fall of 1947, but the airport has grown into the largest municipally owned and operated airport in Canada. Ten airlines operate there, with 75 daily flight to 18 destinations. The seat capacity in 2022 was 2,405,461. The total passenger count was 1,718,056 and they flew to 18 different destinations.

No tax dollars go to supporting the airport, the city said in the report.

**BCFED declares boycott of Vancouver airport hotels in support of striking members**

The B.C. Federation of Labour has declared a boycott of three Vancouver Airport hotels in support of UNIT HERE Local 40 members on strike at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport hotel.

The federation announced in a media release that its boycott extends to both the Hilton Vancouver Airport and the Marriott Vancouver Airport, which it says are owned by the same company.

"Our movement doesn't use boycotts lightly. But when an employer repeatedly treats their workers with callous disrespect and appalling unfairness, a boycott is exactly the right response. UNITE HERE Local 40 workers deserve our full support – and this employer does not deserve a dime of our business," said Sussan Skidmore, president of the B.C. Federation of Labour.

Officers of the federation, which represents almost 50 affiliated unions with 500,000 members in B.C., voted on June 23 to declare the boycott. They are urging other unions to avoid using

