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ASTRONOMICAL WATER USAGE

Osoyoos consumes water at seven times the national average

Don Urquhart - Jul 11, 2023 / 10:09 am



Photo: Don Urquhart

The 402 Reservoir at Strawberry Creek (pictured above) along with the Dividend Ridge Reservoir are both fed by the two-basin 340 South Reservoir at the end of 74th Ave.

Osoyoos continues to consume water at over seven times the national average leading to low reservoir levels that could impede firefighting ability.

The town says that since moving to Stage 2 Water Restrictions on June 16, 2023, there have been some positive developments in water consumption.

Reservoir levels have stabilized during the week, consistently staying above 60 per cent during the high-demand period from 12 a.m. to 6 a.m. "This ensures sufficient fire storage if the need arises," the town said in a statement.

But the town warns problems remain. "The move to Stage 2 Water Restrictions has been helpful, but we're facing challenges on the two permitted days," the town warned. Saturday and Sunday sees high demand which has been causing reservoir levels to drop below 50 per cent, and putting the town in a precarious situation should a major fire occur.

The town went on to note that Osoyoos' water consumption far exceeds the national average of 411 litres per person/day, reaching 3,000 litres per person/day during the summer months. The only time the town comes close to the national average is January.

The majority of the community's water demand (between April and October) is contributed to irrigation of lawns and gardens. The town confirmed this through the monitoring of sanitary sewer flows which have not increased.

To help do its part, the town has reduced its watering days in all parks and green spaces fed by the domestic system and said it will be looking at options to get more parks and green spaces off the domestic water system in the coming years.

The town also emphasized the importance of understanding the fact that Canadians rank second only to the US in terms of highest per capita water use in the developed world.

The town cited the book "On Guard for Thee? Water (Ab)uses and Management in Canada which says a "general lack of awareness" about the pressures placed on Canadian water supplies, combined with a "lack of strong water conservation ethic, which is encouraged by the myth of water abundance" helps to explain this poor standing.

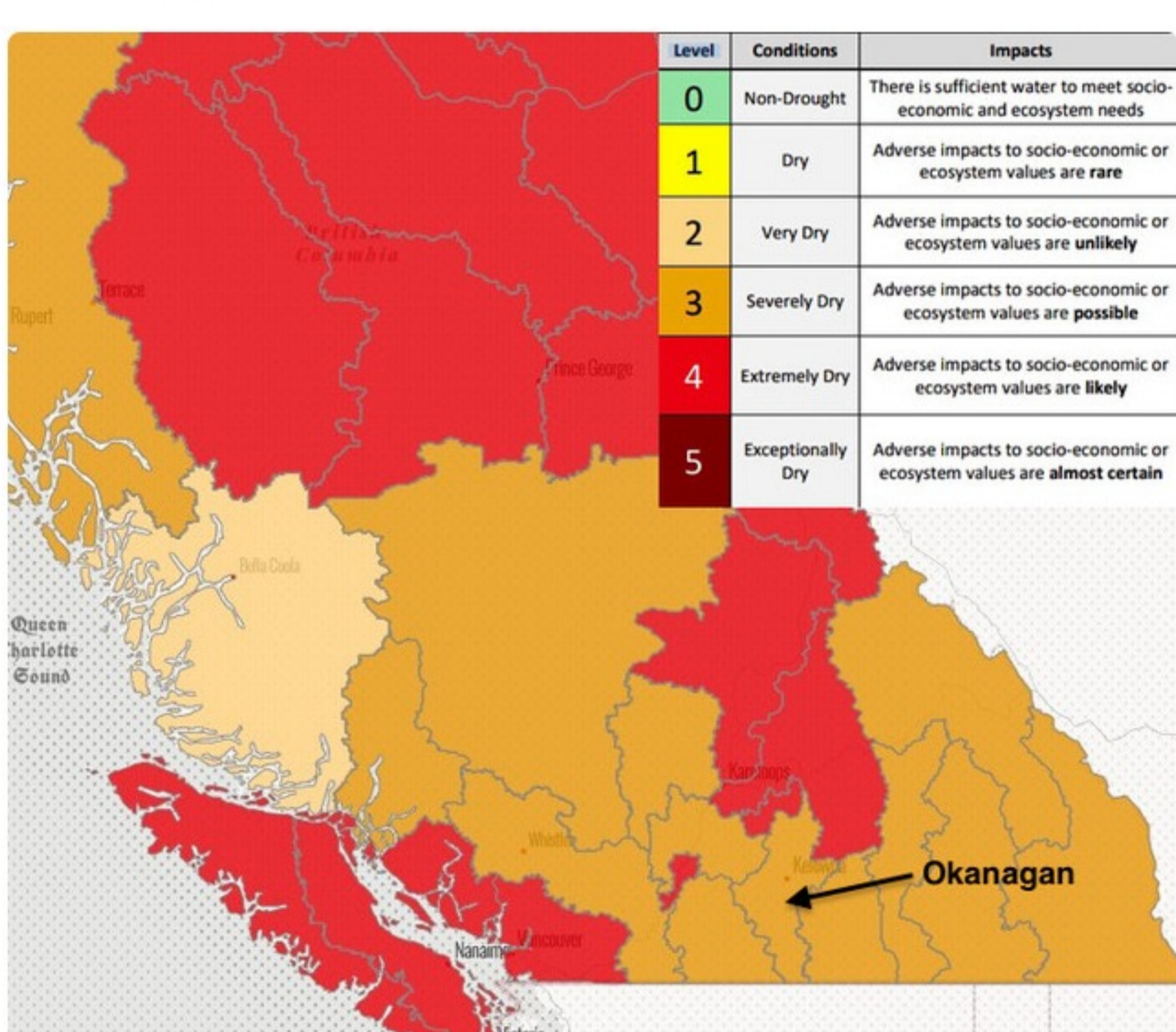


Photo: BC Drought Information Portal
BC's current drought situation as of July 11.

The town also recently reminded residents and visitors of the lingering effects from a late 2022 drought, an early freshet, warm and dry spring conditions, and declining streamflows all combined to prompt the province to move the Okanagan to a Level 2 drought (very dry) status.

The water shortage is also of great concern for fish, with the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) noting the Okanagan Basin is the most northern extent accessible by anadromous (returning from the sea to spawn in rivers and streams) salmon in the Columbia River system.

Sockeye, Chinook, Steelhead and Coho (in small numbers) use Okanagan tributaries for spawning and rearing. Okanagan streams and lakes are also home to resident Kokanee, Rainbow Trout and Whitefish.

"These fish species are culturally important to the Syilx Nation, support a vibrant fishery, and are critical for healthy freshwater systems," the OBWB said.

Low streamflows caused by the various drought factors have already raised significant concern amongst fisheries biologists. The low streamflows can impede fish passage to spawning and feeding areas, increase susceptibility to disease and predation, cause stranding, or result in fish kills due to low oxygen and high water temperatures.

The biologists are reporting similar conditions to 2015 when more than 90 per cent of Okanagan Sockeye that entered the Columbia River died before reaching their spawning grounds.

Provincial staff are monitoring groundwater levels closely because sufficient groundwater is also important for fish.

When high air temperatures warm surface flows, groundwater upwelling in stream beds creates cool areas where fish can survive, the OBWB says.

The OBWB promotes water conservation through its Okanagan WaterWise program, Make Water Work (MWW). It aims to tackle the second largest use of water in the valley – household lawns and gardens.

The campaign began in May when residents begin to turn on their taps, and runs until early October as water supplies drop and water is still needed for fall harvest crops, fish returning to local creeks to spawn, and increasingly, for firefighting.

For more information on water conservation including watering tips and suggestions on the best plants to put in your garden visit makewaterwork.ca.

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