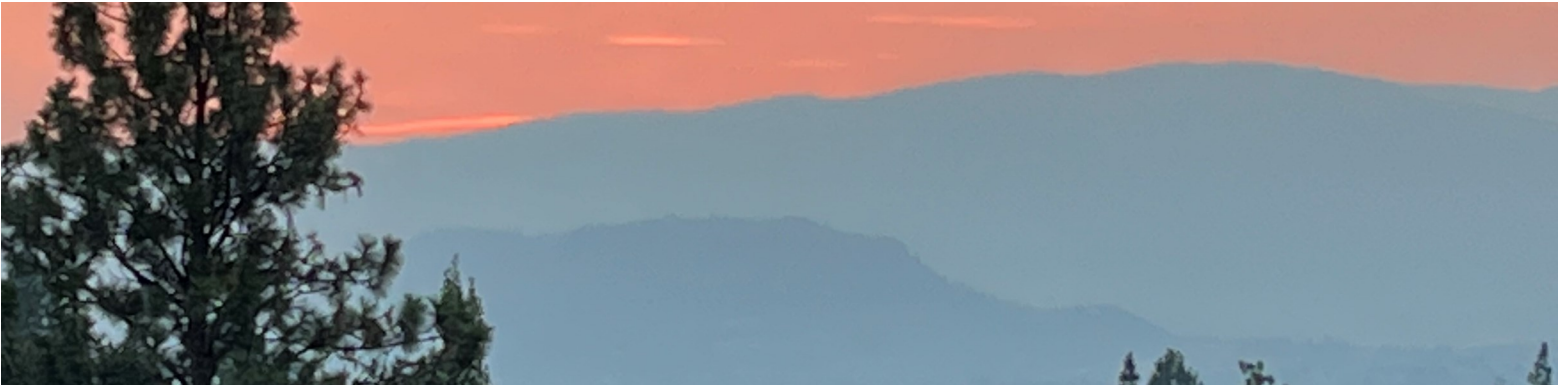


OKANAGAN DROUGHT BULLETIN #2023-3

August 4, 2023



OKANAGAN REGION NOW IN DROUGHT LEVEL 4

Lack of precipitation, low streamflows, high water temperatures that can be lethal to fish, and sustained warm weather have prompted the Government of B.C. to move the Okanagan to Drought Level 4.

While water systems that are supported by upland storage reservoirs and mainstem lakes are doing okay, many important fish-bearing streams in the Okanagan are flowing well below normal and several are completely dry. The forecast is for continued hot and dry weather in August, so it is unlikely that flows will improve without drastic conservation measures.

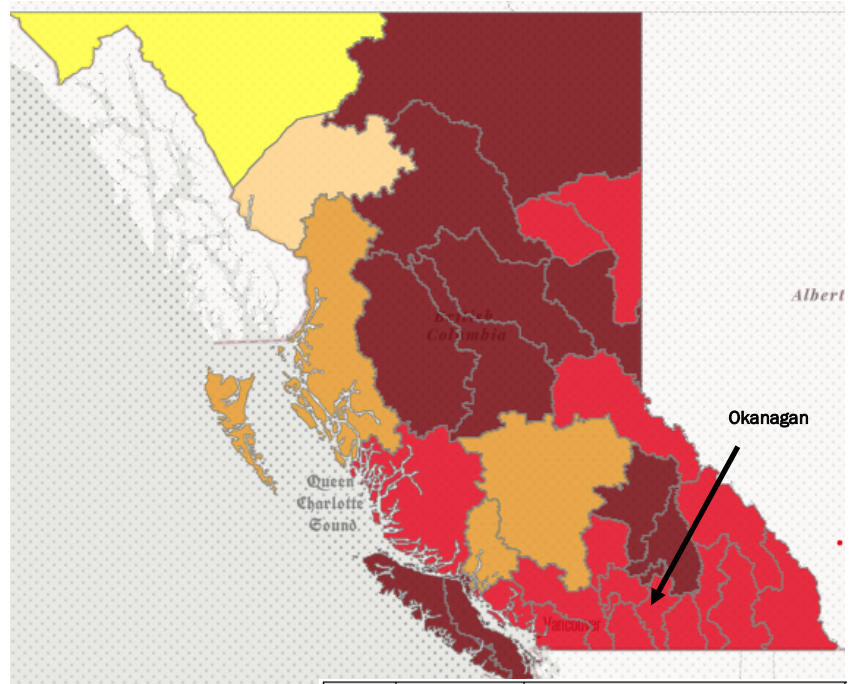
The B.C. Government is working with water licensees to ensure they reduce use, and is taking enforcement action where needed to protect the most sensitive areas. Water purveyors with upstream storage should closely follow their release schedule requirements to avoid low flows downstream. Flows in some streams can change rapidly during hot, dry conditions.

Water conservation is everyone's responsibility. People and businesses in affected areas should reduce water use wherever possible and observe all watering restrictions set by their water purveyor. We need to work together to make sure there is enough water for fish, agriculture, and fighting wildfires.

Please note, local water restrictions (**stages**) are set using different indicators than provincial drought **levels** and federal drought **ratings**. (Learn more at <https://www.obwb.ca/drought-classification-systems-used-in-b.c./>). Whether a community moves to a higher restriction stage depends on several factors, including customer demand, infrastructure capacity, and local water supply conditions (e.g. reservoir storage), which can vary across the region.

Provincial drought level map on August 3, 2023

Source: [BC Drought Information Portal](#)



British Columbia is experiencing severe drought levels and unprecedented drought conditions across the province. As of July 27, most of B.C.'s water basins have been elevated to "Extremely Dry" (Level 4) or "Exceptionally Dry" (Level 5).

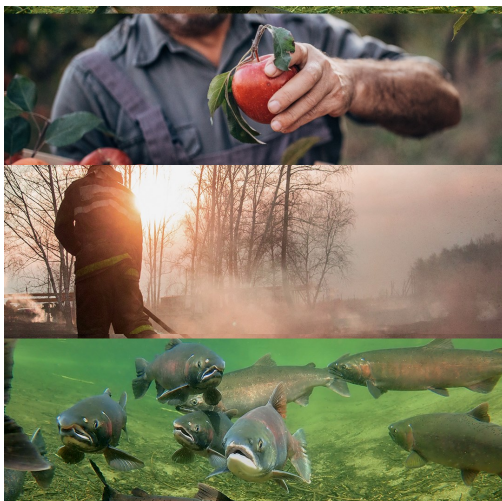
Level	Conditions	Impacts
0	Non-Drought	There is sufficient water to meet socio-economic and ecosystem needs
1	Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are rare
2	Very Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are unlikely
3	Severely Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are possible
4	Extremely Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are likely
5	Exceptionally Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are almost certain

WATER FOR FISH, FOOD PRODUCTION, AND FIREFIGHTING

Water is essential to fish and ecosystem health, food production, and fire suppression in the Okanagan.

The Okanagan is home to many fish species that are culturally important to the *Sylix* people, support a vibrant fishery, and are critical for healthy freshwater systems. Low water levels are occurring in several streams in the Okanagan and are resulting in fish kills (die-offs) due to stranding. Low oxygen and high water temperatures are also a threat. If conditions don't improve, fish will have a difficult or impossible time returning to their spawning areas this fall. By using water efficiently on our farms, in businesses, and in our yards now, we can help keep enough water in the streams for fish spawning later in the year.

Many crops in the Okanagan will still need water for the next couple of months. Hot and dry conditions make for thirsty plants! But good water management by farmers is possible, and is crucial in a year like this. Fix leaks, assess and improve your irrigation system, and adjust your irrigation schedule to use water as efficiently as possible. See www.obwb.ca/ag for drought management resources created specifically for agriculture.



Water is also needed for fire suppression and protection, particularly during this year's extreme fire season. More than 1,500 fires have started in the province this year, and there are currently 348 active fires. Of these, 28 are in the Kamloops Fire Centre area, which includes the Okanagan, and four are wildfires of note (highly visible or pose a potential threat to public safety).

Everyone must use water efficiently and conserve what they can, ensuring enough for food production, fish spawning, ecosystem health, and firefighting.

RESIDENTIAL WATER CONSERVATION

With the Okanagan now declared in Level 4 drought, as the valley begins to see streams going dry and with a forecast for continued hot, dry conditions, it is critical that we all do our part to conserve. Level 4 indicates that a region is "extremely dry" and adverse impacts to people, the economy, and/or the environment are likely.



To help residents do their part, the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program is working with water utilities to deliver the Make Water Work campaign, tackling the 2nd largest use of all water in the Okanagan – outdoor residential use

in summer. It includes a website that encourages residents to pledge to conserve with a chance to win a \$500 WaterWise yard upgrade, and provides tried and true tips to maintain a beautiful yard while conserving water.

The pledges and tips include:

- Water between dusk and dawn.
- Water plants, not pavement.
- Never mow low. Let it grow.
- Tune up your irrigation system.
- Aerate the lawn and top dress with compost.
- Choose plants suitable to our dry climate.



To help with this last pledge, we developed the *Make Water Plant Collection* which includes 105 perennials, grasses, trees and shrubs that will do well in the Okanagan's dry climate. The collection is promoted at garden centres throughout the valley and we also work with irrigation companies to promote outdoor watering products that conserve. Local utilities have also been provided with a number of outreach tools too, including Make Water Work gardening gloves.

Visit www.MakeWaterWork.ca to find tips, the Make Water Work Plant Collection, watering restrictions and more.

Interested in becoming a Make Water Work partner? Contact Corinne Jackson at corinne.jackson@obwb.ca or 250-469-6271 for more information.