

OKANAGAN DROUGHT BULLETIN #2023-4

August 17, 2023



OKANAGAN REGION IN DROUGHT LEVEL 5

Lack of rain, 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 5, where adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are almost certain.

Many important fish-bearing streams in the Okanagan are flowing at historical lows and several are completely dry. The forecast is for continued hot and dry weather in August, so it is unlikely that conditions will improve without drastic conservation measures.

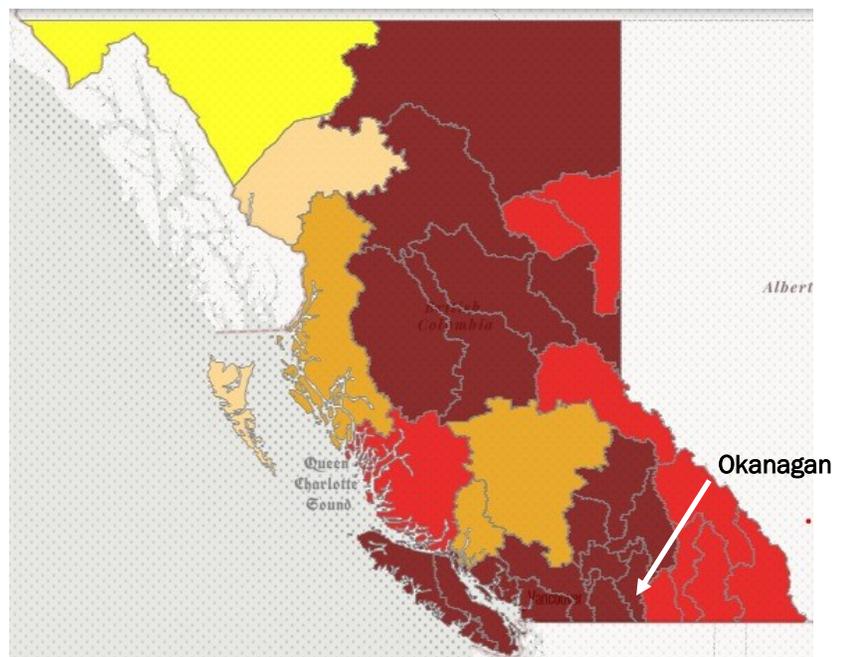
The B.C. Government is working with water licensees to ensure they reduce use, and is taking enforcement action where needed to protect the most sensitive areas. Water purveyors with upstream storage should closely follow their release schedule requirements to avoid low flows downstream. Flows in some 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 utility. 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 17, 2023

Source: [BC Drought Information Portal](#)



British Columbia is experiencing severe drought levels and unprecedented drought conditions across the province. More than half of the province is in Level 5 drought, with an additional almost 30% of the province in Level 4.

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

DROUGHT RESPONSE — WE CAN ALL TAKE ACTION

Government of B.C.

The Government of B.C. is responsible for drought response guided by their [Drought and Water Scarcity Response Plan](#).

When voluntary water conservation measures are not sufficient to meet all water user rights, protect critical environmental flows or the survival of a fish population, the *Water Sustainability Act* provides the Government of B.C. with the authority to regulate both stream water and groundwater. On August 16, Fish Population Protection Orders were put in place for Salmon River and Besette Creek to maintain water levels for spawning salmon. 398 surface and groundwater licence holders were ordered to stop using water for forage crops to preserve water levels. With conditions as they are throughout the Thompson Okanagan region, more protection orders are likely.

Indigenous communities



Shuttleworth Creek, Aug. 10,
Courtesy Okanagan Nation
Alliance

Indigenous communities are working hard to conserve, protect, restore, and enhance fish populations, reinvigorate traditional fisheries practices, and advocate for rights and title with respect to fisheries interests.

Staff are out in the field now, monitoring stream flows and temperatures, doing fish counts, advocating for better protection measures, and completing fish salvages, where needed.

Local water suppliers

Local authorities implement water restrictions and other responses to water shortages according to their drought management plans and bylaws. Whether a community moves to a higher restriction stage depends on customer demand, infrastructure capacity, and local water supply conditions, which can vary across the region. Water suppliers also have an important role in educating their communities about water conservation.

Most of the large water suppliers in the Okanagan are supported by storage in the uplands or along the mainstem. Careful management of this storage can make the water last throughout the season even when it's dry. Many water suppliers have provincially regulated fishery flow requirements that they must meet in the downstream creeks and streams.

Farmers and ranchers

Agriculture feeds our community and our economy, and requires water to do so. When it's hot and dry, crops and livestock need more water to survive. But good water management is essential right now, particularly in areas where water sources are not backed by storage. When streamflows become critically low, drastic measures need to be taken to make sure there is water available for fish and other aquatic life, helping protect the larger ecosystem it supports.

Good water management will meet the crop's water needs while preventing water loss due to runoff, leaching, or drift.

Visit www.OBWB.ca/ag for tools and information about increasing water-use efficiency and responding to drought on the farm.



Residents, tourists, and industry

The OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise program has stepped up drought communication through its valley-wide "Make Water Work" campaign, with TV ads (<https://youtu.be/OvPJFMa9d0c>), radio ads (<https://tinyurl.com/2xfknpv6>), and social media postings.



Additional conservation messaging is being delivered with wrapped vehicles, billboards, and by water utility and water-related business partners. Messaging touches on the importance of following local water restrictions,

ensuring enough water for what's most important: the fish, food crops, and firefighting.

The Make Water Work website at www.MakeWaterWork.ca remains an important source of up-to-date information for the Okanagan. Make Water Work partners are urged to encourage residents to visit the website for conservation tips, water restriction information, landscaping help and more.