



Stock image of drought conditions near Kalamalka Provincial Park (ID 59301229 © Katyenka | Dreamstime.com)

DROUGHT LEVEL 5

By Liam Verster

Water conservation encouraged as drought conditions persist

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Though the temperatures are dropping as fall approaches, Vernon and the Okanagan is still facing a drought.

At last report from the Provincial Technical Drought Working Group on Sept. 14, the Okanagan Basin and the other surrounding watersheds were all still classified as Level 5 Drought, the highest drought level in B.C.

Speaking with *Vernon Matters* Monday, Sept.18, Corinne Jackson with the Okanagan Water Basin Board (OBWB), said the water levels remain low as the drought is ongoing.

“We are hopeful that we are going to get some rain, but we would require a lot of rain to bring us out of the Drought Level 5 that we’re at currently,” Jackson said, adding she could not comment on the forecast but did state that a lot of precipitation is needed for the area.

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“We need a lot of rain over the next couple of months, or potentially snowfall up in our higher elevations that can melt, to recharge streams and recharge reservoirs and even groundwater in some areas because groundwater is also connected to surface water and we’re seeing an interaction there where low groundwater levels are impacting surface flows in some areas.”

The OBWB also has concerns about the water levels affecting streams where fish spawn.

“If water levels are too low and temperatures are too high, it puts those fish at risk,” Jackson said.

“We’re also aware of some fish strandings in the Okanagan where they’ve been able to swim up but then it dries out below them.”

She added it’s also harvest time for many farmers in the Okanagan, and they still need water for crops.

Jackson said if the conditions do not improve, and there isn’t significant rain or snow, next spring could see a water deficit leading to even more serious conditions and the need for stricter water conservation in the summer.

In order to prevent that scenario, Jackson and the OBWB encourage people to conserve water this fall.

“We’re really asking residents to do their part, to follow water restrictions very closely, to not use more than they should be, and even consider letting lawns go dormant and once the rains come, the lawns will bounce back,” Jackson said.

One of the big things people can do to conserve water this fall and into the future is planting drought-resistant plants.

“In the fall is actually an excellent time to plant because it’s cooler, because in the summer it’s too hot. When it was in the upper 20s and 30s, it was impossible to do any planting,” Jackson told *Vernon Matters*.

“So in the fall it’s actually an excellent time to think about your landscape and converting to be more water wise.”

Another idea for people looking to conserve water is to let fallen leaves accumulate and use them as mulch.

“[Leaves] holds water and feeds your plant material, so if you don’t want them on the lawn then move them into the flower bed, and mulch your garden beds to retain water, the water that they do get, and protect them through our snowy season.”

Jackson also encourages people to reduce their in-home water use such as by only washing full loads of laundry or dishes.

More information on water conservation can be found at the [Make Water Work website](#), along with a contest that sees people who pledge to conserve water entered into prize draws.