Vernon

MULTI-YEAR DROUGHT CONCERN

Okanagan drought conditions improve, but concern lingers over multi-year water shortage

Jon Manchester - Nov 3, 2023 / 4:00 am

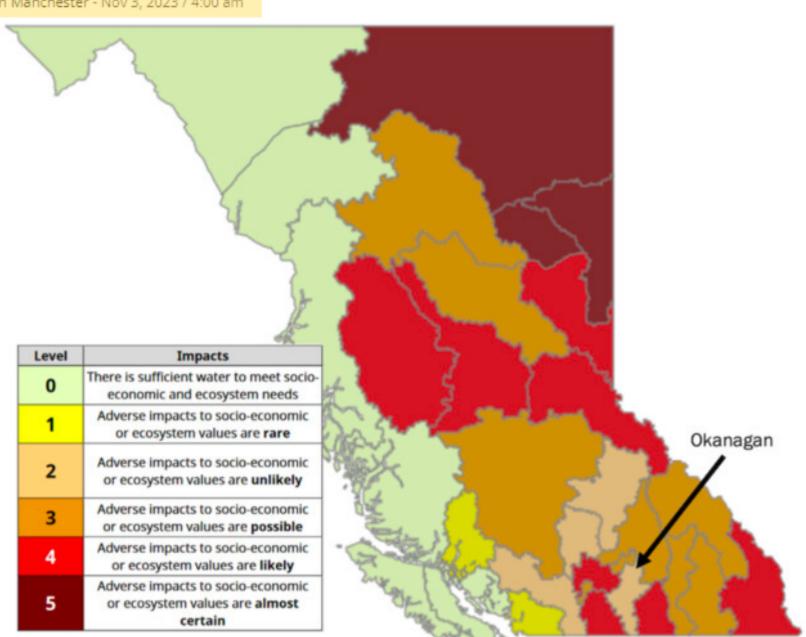


Photo: Okanagan Basin Water Board

specialist.

Drought conditions in the Okanagan have improved to Level 2 — but seasonal forecasts continue to project a warmer and drier than normal fall and winter.

As El Nino conditions continue, a report to the Okanagan Basin Water Board notes the level of Okanagan Lake is below normal, and the release rate at the dam in Penticton has been reduced into the Okanagan River Channel to slow the lake-level fall.

"Given the El Nino conditions, there is a possibility that the drought will continue into 2024," the report states.

"Snow pillows are not yet registering meaningful amounts at Brenda Mines, Mission Creek, or Silver Star stations.

Drought levels for the Okanagan were lowered to Level 2 on Oct. 19. They peaked at Level 5 in August.

the improvement. However, some streams remain at higher drought levels, notes Sandra Schira, a water science

Fall rains, the end of seasonal agricultural irrigation, and dropping temperatures contributed to

Shuttleworth and Vaseux creeks remain at Level 5.

Equisis, Shingle/Shatford and Inkaneep creeks are at Level 3.

"Many stations were at, or close to, the lowest recorded flows for much of the summer," Schira says in the report.

"With the Okanagan still in drought, there is concern about the potential for a multi-year drought if significant recharge does not occur over winter. Hopefully, additional precipitation this fall and winter will allow the Okanagan to rebound."

"Unless we have enough precipitation in the fall and winter for aquifers and reservoirs to rebound, there is concern we could start next year's farming and gardening season in drought," a communications report adds.

The Okanagan hydrometric monitoring program noted diminished flows in October, in stark contrast to stream flow and cold-water-temperature needs for spawning kokanee and salmon.

"As the repercussions of climate change intensify, this (hydrometric) data becomes a linchpin for predicting floods and preparing for droughts," says a third water board report.

"Given the Okanagan's stature as a key agricultural centre ... reliable data ensures that farmers can make judicious irrigation choices, maximizing their crop output while preserving water."

Meanwhile, progress has been made on a climate indicators dashboard that can display indicators

for Kelowna, Vernon and Penticton, both annually and seasonally. The dashboard covers temperature, precipitation and inflows into Okanagan Lake, natural

importance of grasping and emphasizing (flow needs)," the water board says.

streams, and Mission Creek, the largest tributary to Okanagan Lake.

An environmental flow needs conference will be held in Kelowna in March.

"The Okanagan Valley's semi-arid climate, coupled with a growing population, amplifies the

The conference will "help equip local authorities to judiciously allocate water, striking a balance between ecological preservation and societal demands. As climate change reshapes our surroundings, the significance of EFNs in mitigating drought impacts and conserving biodiversity

Back to Homepage

grows exponentially."