

OKANAGAN DROUGHT BULLETIN #2024-1

May 16, 2024



OKANAGAN MOVED TO DROUGHT LEVEL 2

Lingering effects from the 2023 drought, low winter snowpack, low precipitation, and warmer than normal temperatures causing an early freshet, have prompted the Government of B.C. to move the Okanagan to a Level 2 drought rating. While recent localized rains have helped, drought conditions will persist into 2024 unless we have prolonged rain within the next few weeks.

Okanagan water purveyors should closely monitor supplies and customer demand and begin communicating with customers in preparation for continuing drought conditions this summer.

The Okanagan spent more than half of 2023 in drought, starting in June, and this drought is persisting into 2024. The below normal snowpack this winter means, despite some rain in April, the Okanagan hasn't seen significant recovery from last year's drought. In addition to the low snowpack, above normal temperatures have caused an earlier melt. For example, Brenda Mines reported the earliest ever snow-free conditions in its 28 year record. This early melt has led to an early freshet, bringing concerns for late season water supply. Projections are also calling for above normal temperatures and minimal precipitation to continue through to July.

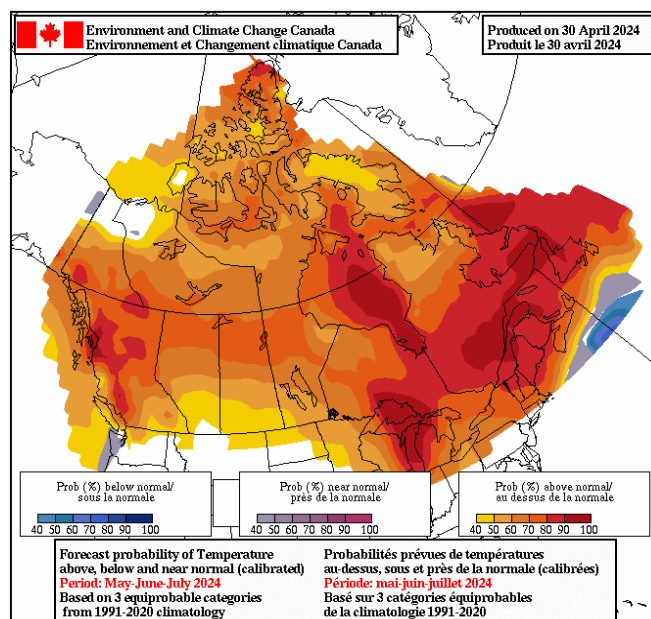
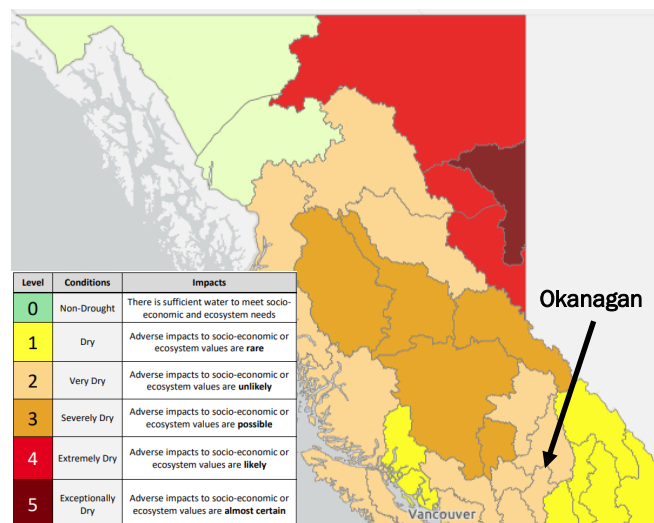
Okanagan drought levels have been set to "Very Dry" (Level 2). At this level, there is emphasis on curtailing unauthorized water use and water suppliers may consider implementing water restrictions.

Local water restrictions (*stages*) are set using different indicators than provincial drought *levels*, and water supply conditions vary across the region. Whether a utility moves to a higher restriction stage depends on several factors, including customer demand, infrastructure capacity, and local water supply conditions. That said, everyone should be using water wisely.

Customers of water utilities should comply with all watering restrictions and advice from their supplier. Water licence holders on streams and wells who are not customers of local water utilities should adhere to conservation measures communicated by the Government of B.C.

Provincial drought level map on May 16, 2024

Source: [BC Drought Information Portal](#)



The long-term forecast is for above normal temperatures this summer. Source: [ECCC](#)

Implementing effective water conservation strategies now will help mitigate the effects of drought. By working together we can help reduce conflict and support both agriculture and fish, through 2024 and into the future.

WATER FOR FISH

Using water efficiently on our farms and in our yards now, can help keep enough water in the streams and aquifers to support fish spawning later in the year.

The Okanagan basin is the most northern extent accessible to 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 Okanagan Nation Alliance is continuing restoration efforts of these native and vital fish species and local ecosystems. This work includes annual fry releases. This year, ceremonial releases are being held throughout the Okanagan in May. Details are available at <https://syilx.org/events/fry-releases/>.



WATER FOR FOOD PRODUCTION

Agricultural producers are facing a challenging year as they recover from last year's drought and the cold snap in January. The sudden cold weather resulted in significant crop damage. Ensuring these growers have a reliable water supply through this recovery year will be critical.

Agriculture is the number one use of water in the Okanagan. We refer to this as "working water" since it feeds local communities and the economy. Prolonged periods of dry weather can cause crop damage and water shortages for livestock. Good water management by farmers is essential to make sure the valley's limited and stressed water supply lasts throughout the growing season. Agricultural water users are encouraged to visit www.OBWB.ca/ag to find tools and information that can help conserve water and maximize crop yield.

RESIDENTIAL WATER CONSERVATION

The OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program works with water utilities throughout the valley to deliver the "Make Water Work" (MWW) campaign, encouraging residential outdoor water conservation from mid-May to mid-October when demand for water is highest. However, as the drought continued through fall and winter, OkWaterWise responded and promoted indoor water conservation efforts.



Now, with spring here and residents anxious to water their yards, preparations are underway to re-launch MWW. This year, with concern about drought and the possibility of another intense fire season, the messaging has been reviewed to ensure it meets WaterWise but also FireSmart best practices. The *Make Water Work Plant Collection* list has been updated to indicate the plants that have been tested and deemed FireSmart. The plant collection is promoted by garden centre partners throughout the Okanagan. The campaign will also be emphasizing past messages that encourage residents to save water for what's most important: food, fish and firefighting.

This year's campaign will include:

- an interactive MakeWaterWork.ca website where residents can find local watering restrictions, tips to make water work better, the *Make Water Work Plant Collection*, a contest to encourage pledges to conserve with the chance to win WaterWise yard prizes, and more;
- advertising on billboards, TV, radio, digital and social media;
- MWW materials for partners to distribute, including gardening gloves; and
- a friendly challenge, encouraging residents to pledge to help their community win the title of "Make Water Work Champions."

Interested in becoming a MWW utility or business partner? Email corinne.jackson@obwb.ca or call 250-469-6271.