

## OKANAGAN DROUGHT BULLETIN #2024-2

July 19, 2024



### OKANAGAN BACK TO DROUGHT LEVEL 2

The Okanagan began 2024 at Drought Level 2 due, in part, to low snowpack. With rain events in May and June, the Okanagan was downgraded to Level 1. After this reprieve, the recent heatwave, low stream flows and increasing water temperatures have prompted the Government of B.C. to move the Okanagan back to Drought Level 2.

*Okanagan water purveyors should continue to monitor supplies and customer demand closely and communicate the importance of conservation with customers as we enter a low flow period.*

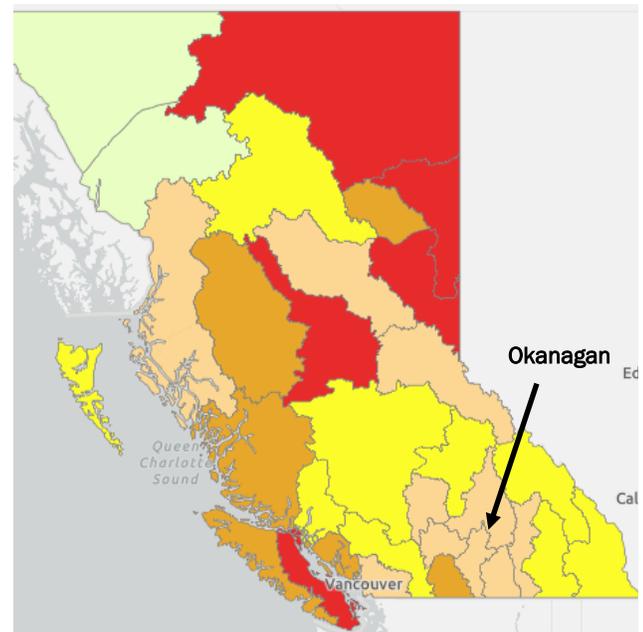
Low snowpack last winter and an early melt meant the Okanagan did not fully recover from the 2023 drought. Considering water supply conditions, the province set the Drought Level at 2 on May 2. Thanks to some precipitation in May and an improvement to stream flows, the Okanagan was downgraded to Drought Level 1 on May 30. June – typically the wettest month in the Okanagan – saw about normal precipitation; An improvement over the past few years where June was very dry.

However, the current heatwave has come with air temperatures over 35C and water temperatures in some creeks reaching 27C (concerning for fish mortality). Many creeks across the watershed are also seeing a rapid drop in flows. In consultation with Okanagan utilities and Okanagan Nation Alliance’s fisheries department staff, the province has increased the drought level back to 2 (*Very Dry*). 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.

Several Okanagan utilities have increased their water restrictions. These can be found at [www.MakeWaterWork.ca](http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca). 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 July 18, 2024  
Source: [BC Drought Information Portal](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov2/serv/bc/drought/)



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 <b>rare</b>
2	Very Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are <b>unlikely</b>
3	Severely Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are <b>possible</b>
4	Extremely Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are <b>likely</b>
5	Exceptionally Dry	Adverse impacts to socio-economic or ecosystem values are <b>almost certain</b>

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

## WATER FOR FIREFIGHTING



As temperatures rise and water supplies begin to drop in some areas, there is concern about ensuring enough water for the valley's most important needs, including firefighting.

Exterior wildfire sprinklers are increasingly being used by residents to help protect their property when wildfires break out nearby. However, widespread use of exterior sprinklers connected to shared water systems can impede available water supply used by firefighters during a wildland urban interface fire. And, this has been an issue for some fire departments trying to respond to recent wildfires.

If you have sprinklers and there is time, set up the sprinklers or leave them at the end of the driveway, and leave them for the fire crews to turn on as needed.

In the case of the Regional District of North Okanagan, residents who connect any external wildfire sprinklers (including ground level sprinklers) to a municipal source will have them turned off at the curb-stop valve and will be subject to fines.

## WATER FOR FISH

The Okanagan basin is an extremely important region for fish. Sockeye, Chinook, Steelhead and Coho (in small numbers) use Okanagan tributaries for spawning and rearing. The Okanagan is 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.

Current temperatures in many streams are warm enough to cause a significant risk of fish fatalities as fish require cool water temperatures. Likewise low stream flows can impede fish migration and lead to fish getting stranded. Ensuring stream flows are meeting environmental flow thresholds helps prevent significant or irreversible harm to the stream's aquatic ecosystem.

## RESIDENTIAL WATER CONSERVATION

“Make Water Work” is an annual valley-wide residential outdoor water conservation campaign, delivered between spring and fall by the OBWB’s Okanagan WaterWise outreach and education program and with water utilities throughout the valley.



Recognizing that the valley did not fully recover from last year’s drought, and with hot temperatures and little precipitation expected in the weeks ahead, Okanagan utilities have been increasing watering restrictions. The purpose of Make Water Work is to provide residents with effective and even easy ways to maintain their yard while being WaterWise.

One way is by using our “Make Water Work Plant Collection” which is promoted and available at garden centres throughout the valley. New this year, we partnered with FireSmart BC to note the many plants on the list that are also FireSmart.

The Make Water Work (MWW) website has also been updated. In addition to providing information on the plant collection, Okanagan water restrictions, WaterWise yard tips, and a pledge contest, a drought meter has been added on the homepage. This provides information on the latest local drought level announced by the province and how it relates to local water restrictions.



MWW messaging can be seen on billboards and buses, digital and social media, and heard on radio and TV. On-site customer outreach is being conducted at garden centre and irrigation partner businesses. And outreach materials, have been delivered to partners.

Interested in becoming a Make Water Work utility or business partner? Email [corinne.jackson@obwb.ca](mailto:corinne.jackson@obwb.ca) or call 250-469-6271.