

Full and running over

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Westside Weekly

May's grey weather has brightened the outlook of at least one water purveyor on the Westside. Although a warm dry winter raised concerns about water shortages in the Okanagan, May was cooler and wetter than normal which left the Westbank Irrigation District in better shape than it had been at the end of April.

The Kelowna Airport recorded below-average temperatures and over 49 millimetres of precipitation in May – more than 10 mm over the average. June usually has the highest amount of precipitation with an average of 40.7 mm.

By early June, Westbank Irrigation District's six reservoirs were full, said Brian Jamieson, general manager for the Westbank Irrigation District. While flowers bloomed in Westbank, higher elevations still had plenty of snow left to melt. Tadpole Lake, the highest of the six reservoirs that supply water to the irrigation district, still had ice on it.

"The cooler wetter spring has allowed the spring run off to last longer and that's helped us," said Jamieson. The irrigation district is currently using water from run off to supply its customers. Jamieson hopes that will continue until the end of June.

After runoff, the irrigation district will start releasing water from the reservoirs to meet customer demand.

The cooler weather has also meant that the demand for water was down in April and May as people delayed using sprinklers.

"We actually delivered less water to our customers than we did last spring," Jamieson said.

This year's wet spring is a change from last year when only three of six reservoirs filled and the irrigation district began to use water stored in the reservoirs June 8.

"The earliest we've ever gone on storage was June 2, so last year was pretty tough," said Jamieson.

Because of last year's low snow pack, dry spring and warm weather, the Westbank Irrigation District implemented stage two water restrictions last June. Stage two limits customers to watering twice per week and prohibits non-essential watering such as washing down sidewalks, driveways and buildings, except for fire protection.

The restrictions have remained in effect.

"It's such a big deal to rescind it and start it up again, communication wise," Jamieson said.

"The board of trustees will probably make a decision near the end of June whether to come off stage two and go back to stage one, which is every other day," he added. "It just depends on when we have to go on storage."

The wet weather has also meant that water levels are rising in Okanagan Lake. The lake is already higher than at its peak



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A pedestrian walks through a downpour earlier this spring.

last year and is a little over four inches below full pool. This is good news for Westbank First Nation and some of the smaller water systems on the westside such as Sunnyside and West Kelowna Estates that get their water from the lake.

Lakeview Irrigation District has been running full pool and spilling for the last month or so, said James Moller, the district manager of the Lakeview Irrigation District.

Unlike many other water purveyors, Moller said that Lakeview has not had any issues with its water supply since it provided an extra 40 per cent storage in the Big Horn Dam reservoir in 2006. Lakeview customers can water every other day.

The Okanagan Basin Water Board is working to develop a drought plan for the Okanagan watershed.

"The fact is, the Okanagan Valley is a semi-arid desert and has one of the lowest water availabilities per person in Canada. In addition, it has some of the fastest population growth in the country. All of this puts pressure on our water supply," said a release from the water board, announcing \$10,000 in provincial government funding toward the plan.

The valley-wide drought plan would look at the implications of the First-In-Time, First-In-Right system, in which water allocation is determined by who received their licence first and devise a plan that best meets the environmental, health and economic needs of all Okanagan communities.