

Too early to predict a drought in the Okanagan this summer, but early snow melt a worry

By *Steve Arstad*

[Google+](#) [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#)



(ADAM PROSKIW /InfoTel Multimedia)

February 27, 2016 - 2:30 PM

PENTICTON - It's hard to predict moisture conditions in the Okanagan Valley thanks to the regions variable annual rainfall patterns and the impact it has on those who try to control water flows and lake levels.

That from Okanagan Basin Water Board executive director Anna Warwick Sears during a presentation this week at the Okanagan Similkameen Regional District board meeting.

Sears told the board it was widely predicted last year the Okanagan would see drought conditions again this year, but "it hasn't turned out that way so far."

Using the Mission Creek watershed in the Central Okanagan as an example, Warwick Sears says the stream flow graphs indicate an above average snowpack so far this year. She noted conditions last year included an abrupt snowpack melt.

"That was a dramatic melt, that reflected the warmth of last year," she said.

Warwick Sears also notes lake levels rose above maximum levels in February and March last year, forcing downstream dam operators to release water as fast as possible during that period to avoid possible flooding from June rains the valley usually gets.

"The rain didn't show up, and the water in the lake levels fell to below optimal," Warwick Sears says, adding the management of water flows over the past winter has brought lake levels back up.

This year's early snow melt means a delicate balancing act when it comes to managing water in the valley, she says.

"We can still have an above average snow pack, but the degree to which we experience water shortages depends a lot on when it melts," she says. "The good thing about this year is everybody's water storage was recharged, so people who have storage are in pretty good condition."

Streams not protected by storage, with fish or individual water licenses in them might not fare well if the valley gets an early melt without June rains, Warwick Sears says.

She says the best guess is if weather conditions are similar to last year there is a possibility of localized flooding before drought conditions arrive.

Oliver regional district director Terry Schaefer, who works at higher elevations in the valley, says his crew noticed creeks already running hard this month at levels they usually see in May.

"The snowpack on Anarchist Mountain was huge this winter, but it's going down very quickly," Schaefer says. "I guess what that's telling me is we're having this really early melt and who knows what's going to happen? It could cool down, we could get rain, but if a lot of (the snowpack) is being released now, there may be a lot less to come down when we normally get it."

To contact the reporter for this story, email Steve Arstad at sarstad@infonews.ca or call 250-488-3065. To contact the editor, email mjones@infonews.ca or call 250-718-2724.

News from © InfoTel News Ltd, 2016

