

Planning for reduced water use in Okanagan starting early this year

By [Judie Steeves - Kelowna Capital News](#)

Published: **May 14, 2010 11:00 PM**

While next door water was sprayed into the hot, dry, mid-day air, running off and sluicing down Casorso Road, inside Conrad Pryce was, ironically, explaining the government's plans for handling this year's drought conditions in the Okanagan.

Pryce is the environment ministry's section head for water allocation for this region and he admitted that communication is key to success of any program for handling the water shortage that is inevitable this year for some water utilities.

He was reporting to the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council, the technical advisory committee to the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

He noted that planning for drought has begun much earlier this year than last year, which will be helpful. However, already two utilities in the valley are implementing strict conservation measures. The South East Kelowna Irrigation District has implemented Stage Two water use restrictions and Greater Vernon Services have gone one step further and put in place Stage Three restrictions in response to very low snowpacks and low reservoirs of stored water.

Stage Two means domestic customers may only irrigate two days a week, and non-essential outside water use such as controlling dust or cleaning gutters is prohibited. Failure to comply will result in water being shut off. Agricultural users are restricted to use of 75 per cent of their normal allotment of water. Stage Three restricts outside watering to one day a week.

SEKID has only 39 per cent of the capacity in McCulloch Lake, its main reservoir, although manager Toby Pike said he expects some snowmelt to bring the level up a bit. However, he said irrigation season has already begun because the weather has continued to be dry, so that's already drawing down the reservoir.

Pryce said a team concept will be used for drought planning by the province, with the involvement of First Nations, the ministries of agriculture and environment, the federal fisheries department, local government, water utilities, agricultural associations and the OBWB.

A similar team was set up last summer to plan for last year's drought, and it has just won the premier's award for cross government integration, noted Pryce.

That team will identify key streams and monitor water levels and affected users; communicate and issue regulatory orders, if necessary.

Flows, to ensure fish habitat is protected, and agricultural concerns will be taken into account, he said.

“Collaboration is essential,” he commented.

The OBWB’s webinars, connecting those involved in water management and forecasting, from around the province, are a great resource for sharing information, noted Pryce.

The drought management plan will be evaluated on an ongoing basis, and if more resources are needed, they will be added, he said.