



OKANAGAN ESCALATES TO DROUGHT LEVEL 3

The B.C. Government has declared a Level 3 drought rating for the Okanagan.

It's a year of extremes in the Okanagan. Between June and August, Kelowna broke its record for LEAST SUMMER RAINFALL, with only 7.3 mm accumulated. Penticton and Vernon are poised to break their own records for summer dryness. Kelowna also broke records for HOTTEST July and August.

This follows a record-breaking spring for MOST PRECIPITATION from March to May for Vernon (2nd highest ever recorded), Kelowna (4th highest) and Penticton (ranked number 1 for precipitation), out of 100 years of records.

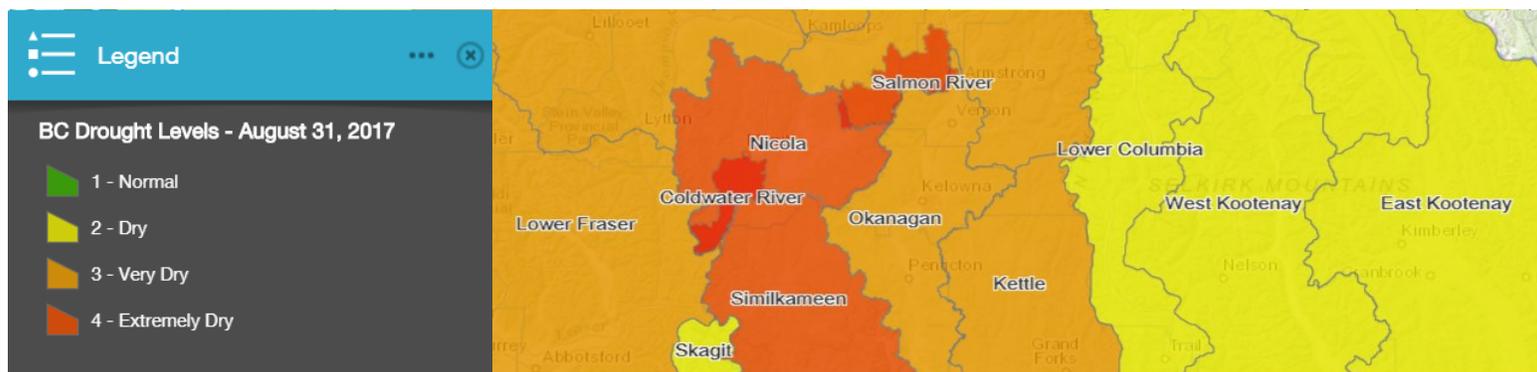
This leaves relatively normal levels in mainstem lakes and upper-watershed reservoirs, but many important fish streams have low flows and warm waters that are harmful for fish. Some streams are completely dry.

Drought Level 3 calls for a voluntary 30% reduction in water use for both surface and groundwater users. Most municipal systems have water conservation bylaws that differ from provincial targets because of stored water in reservoirs. Okanagan water purveyors are generally experiencing normal supply conditions, but given the ongoing hot and dry conditions, all are encouraged to conserve.

The province is asking licensees with upstream storage to follow the release schedule requirements in their licences to avoid potential instream flow issues.

All independent licensees on streams and all groundwater users who are on aquifers that may be connected to streams are **STRONGLY** encouraged to reduce withdrawals.

Information on drought levels and average streamflows is available on the [BC Drought Information Portal](#).



WEATHER FORECAST

The forecast is for above normal temperatures into October. There is more uncertainty about precipitation, but conditions across Western North America continue to range from abnormally dry to extreme drought.

FISHERIES RISKS

Fisheries biologists are concerned this year that low water levels will harm kokanee stream-spawners. Juvenile steelhead and rainbow trout that are rearing in these streams also depend on steady supplies of cool water. Below Penticton, spring chinook salmon, returning from the ocean, are also looking for spawning areas in Okanagan streams. Groundwater needs to be protected as well as surface water—when high air temperatures warm surface flows, groundwater upwelling in streambeds create cool areas where fish can survive. **Call the RAPP line to report fish under stress due to low flows: 1-877-952-RAPP; or use the BCWF Conservation App: www.bcbwf.net.**

Sockeye salmon mostly spawn in the main channel of the Okanagan River, which is still relatively high due to continued releases from Okanagan Lake. This year was already forecast to have low numbers of sockeye return. The concern for sockeye is that continued high water temperature, especially in the Okanagan River in the U.S., may cause the fish to be in poor health by the time they reach their spawning grounds.



Top photo: A dry Bellevue Creek on Aug. 29 in Kelowna. Bottom: Kokanee at Hardy Falls in Peachland, Aug. 20.

COMMUNICATING WATER CONSERVATION WITH THE PUBLIC

The OBWB, through its Okanagan WaterWise program and its **Make Water Work** (MWW) campaign, has started running radio ads regarding the drought. Make Water Work is a valley-wide residential outdoor water conservation initiative, delivered in partnership with local governments and water utilities throughout the Okanagan. The radio ads encourage residents to visit www.MakeWaterWork.ca for water conservation tips and watering restrictions for their neighbourhood... saving water for what's important: food crops, fish and firefighting.

We have been updating the MWW website throughout the summer and will continue to provide updated drought information as conditions change.



In addition to radio and a website, we have MWW messages on billboards, buses, bus shelters, Facebook ads, in social media posts and elsewhere. We are also conducting outreach at events throughout the valley, handing out MWW Frisbees and more.

We also have an **Okanagan Agricultural Water Users Resource Page** to help this sector take proactive steps to use water effectively and be ready to respond if drought conditions worsen during a growing season. Visit www.OBWB.ca/ag for more.

KEEP IN TOUCH!

The OBWB would like to hear about your water supply. Please let us know if you change watering restrictions, and any other factors that influence water availability in your communities. Contact Kellie at kellie.garcia@obwb.ca or 250-469-6321.