

OKANAGAN DROUGHT BULLETIN #2021-2

August 14, 2021



OKANAGAN MOVED TO DROUGHT LEVEL 4

Unprecedented conditions have prompted the Government of B.C. to move the Okanagan to a Level 4 drought. *Water suppliers should do whatever possible to reduce water use in their communities.*

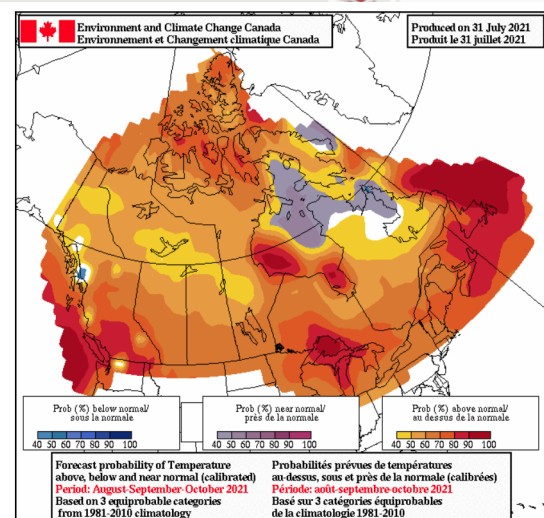
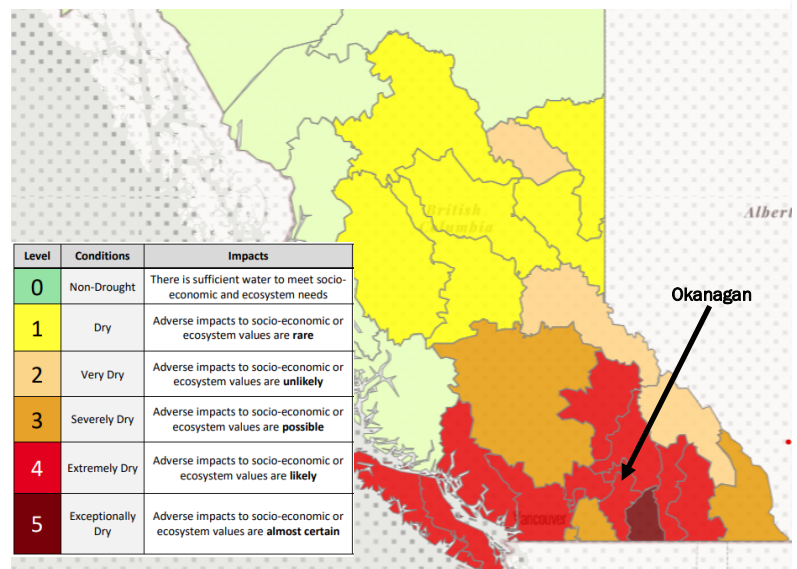
Drought is currently impacting all of southern B.C., with “extremely dry” (Level 4) conditions in the West Kootenay, Lower Columbia, Okanagan, Thompson, Nicola, Lower Fraser, South Coast and Vancouver Island basins and “exceptionally dry” (Level 5) conditions in the Kettle Basin.

Most Okanagan water utilities have already imposed watering restrictions. These restrictions (drought stages) are based on customer demand, infrastructure capacity, reservoir levels, and weather forecasts. Drought stages do not align with provincial drought levels in most cases, but the drought levels are taken into account by water suppliers in determining restrictions. Additionally, the conditions between watersheds across the Okanagan vary, which explains why neighbouring jurisdictions might be in different drought stages with different restrictions. That said, we are all part of “[One valley. One water.](#)” and we all need to be doing our part now.

Customers of local water utilities should comply with all water conservation bylaws, watering restrictions, and other advice from their supplier. Water licence holders on streams and wells who are not customers of local water utilities should take conservation measures appropriate with the provincial drought levels. Refer to the [Government of B.C. drought bulletin](#) dated August 13 for information on those measures.

The long-term forecast is calling for above normal temperatures for the next [three months](#). Precipitation is harder to forecast, but the short-term shows a chance of showers next week for much of the Okanagan. While rain will bring some relief to low streams and dry landscapes, we need a significant amount to make any real difference and improve drought conditions.

Provincial drought level map on August 11, 2021.
Source: [BC Drought Information Portal](#)



BALANCING WATER NEEDS IN A DROUGHT

Water is essential to fish and ecosystem health, food production, and fire suppression in the Okanagan.

The Okanagan is home to many fish species that are culturally important to the *Sylix* people, support a vibrant fishery, and are critical for healthy freshwater systems. Low water levels are occurring in several streams in the Okanagan and are resulting in fish kills (die-offs) due to low oxygen and high water temperatures. If conditions don't improve, fish will have a difficult or impossible time returning to their spawning areas this fall. To reduce stress on the fish, the Government of B.C. has closed [recreational fishing](#) on most streams in the Okanagan. People are asked to report any fish kills they observe, as well as unauthorized water diversions, to the B.C. RAPP line, 1-877-952-7277.

Many crops in the Okanagan will still need water for the next month or so. Hot and dry conditions make for thirsty plants! But good water management by farmers is possible, and is absolutely crucial in a year like this. Minimize water losses by fixing leaks, assess and improve your irrigation system, and adjust your irrigation schedule to use water as efficiently as possible. See www.obwb.ca/ag for drought management resources for agriculture.

Water is also needed for fire suppression and protection, particularly during this year's extreme fire season. There are currently 269 active fires in the province. Of these, 87 are in the Kamloops Fire Centre area, which includes the Okanagan, and 16 are wildfires of note (highly visible or pose a potential threat to public safety).

The next month is going to be difficult. Everyone must use water efficiently and conserve what they can, ensuring enough for food production, fish spawning, ecosystem health, and fire suppression.



A recent photo of Vaseux Creek, courtesy of Okanagan Nation Alliance. The Government of B.C. has declared the creek in Level 5 drought .

RESIDENTIAL WATER CONSERVATION



As the drought deepens, and water supply conditions worsen, we are calling on local governments, utilities, and the public to join us in promoting water conservation. Make Water Work is a valley-wide campaign aimed at helping residents conserve outdoors – curbing the 2nd largest use of all water in our valley. The campaign is delivered by the OBWB's Okanagan WaterWise program in partnership with Okanagan local governments and utilities.

A number of Okanagan mayors have posted [videos](#) of themselves publically pledging to make water work better and conserve this summer. These were posted to social media as a way to raise awareness regarding what individuals can do and challenge residents to go to www.MakeWaterWork.ca, take the pledge, and join the effort. We are inviting others, water utility staff, the public, etc., to do the same, tag us on Facebook and Twitter (@okwaterwise), and Instagram (@okanagan_waterwise) and use the hashtag #MakeWaterWork so we see the post and share it, pushing the message further. We will also be reaching out to social media influencers in the days ahead, asking them to join us.



We have now delivered a number of communication tools to our water utility, garden centre and irrigation partners, to get the message out and help residents make WaterWise choices. Tools include bookmarks, pledge buttons, sandwich boards, and more.



We have also been promoting the MakeWaterWork.ca website as the place for the top outdoor water-saving tips, water restrictions for neighbourhoods around the Okanagan, information on the *Make Water Work Plant Collection*, and more.

Interested in becoming a Make Water Work partner? Contact Corinne Jackson at corinne.jackson@obwb.ca or 250-469-6271 for more information.