

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



June 3, 2019

Record low water levels increase drought level across Cowichan Valley

Duncan, BC – The Cowichan region is currently experiencing drought conditions not typically observed until mid-to-late summer, and as a result the Cowichan Valley Regional District is elevating the region to Drought Level 2 – Dry.

Cowichan communities experienced generally below normal precipitation and above normal temperatures throughout the late winter and early spring of 2019, leading to concerns about drought conditions, both now and throughout the summer. Core indicators for drought levels, including measurements of snowpack, seasonal runoff forecasts, precipitation and streamflow, are all currently at or exceeding the provincial criteria for Drought Level 2.

“While summer drought is very much the new normal for the Cowichan Valley, the warm temperatures and lack of rain we’ve had year-to-date is of significant concern,” said Kate Miller, Manager of Environmental Services for the Cowichan Valley Regional District. “We can see the low lake and river levels, but data from provincial monitoring wells showing three wells in the Cowichan region at record low levels. This tells us the drought is also affecting groundwater aquifers.”

BC’s Technical Drought Working Group, which analyzes conditions and sets the drought level for large water basins across the province, has updated East Vancouver Island to Drought Level 2. The CVRD Environmental Services Division conducted its own analysis of local drought conditions and determined the Cowichan region is rapidly approaching Drought Level 3 conditions.

The situation is especially critical in the Cowichan Watershed, as the lack of spring rain has led to record low lake levels. Salmon fry salvage that normally takes place mid-summer is already under way as lake and river tributaries dry up. Paper Excellence has received permission to reduce flows through the weir at Lake Cowichan to 4.5 cubic metres per second. Even with these emergency low flows, it is forecast that pumping water over the weir will be needed by early August. As a result of current drought conditions, the wildfire danger level is moderate-high (3-4) throughout the Cowichan region, and open burning is strictly prohibited.

Stage 1 watering restrictions are in effect for all CVRD and municipal water systems and residents on wells or in other community systems are encouraged to follow these guidelines to conserve water. Learn more about regional drought levels and water system restrictions by visiting www.newnormalcowichan.ca

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