

July 5, 2016

Drought levels and watering restrictions...What's the story?

With extremely dry conditions on Vancouver Island and the south coast of B.C. this summer, the Province has declared our area to be in a level 4 drought.

What does this mean for Campbell River's water supply? And how are watering restrictions in our community affected by hotter, drier summers and less rain and snowpack the rest of the year?

Drought levels are not the same as local watering restrictions, which vary from community to community. There are two primary reasons for implementing watering restrictions:

1. Amount of water available
2. Ability of the water system to deliver this water

In many communities on Vancouver Island, watering restrictions are in place due to the limited availability of water. In this case, restrictions are affected by the size of the watershed (a larger area captures more rainfall and snow) and the storage volume (in lakes and rivers and as groundwater).

The City of Campbell River is fortunate to have such a clean, resilient and large watershed, with a series of lakes that store water. The Campbell River watershed is more than 1,800 square kilometres in size. This is approximately 3.5 times larger than the Comox Valley watershed – and provides our community with a very generous and reliable source of water throughout the year. As a result, the City of Campbell River does not face the same concerns about running out of water that other communities may face during a drought.

Our watershed provides safe drinking water, fish and wildlife habitat and a beautiful natural area for recreation activities. Plus, it helps reduce the effects of climate change by cooling the air and absorbing greenhouse gas emissions.

The watershed is also a source for hydro power generation. BC Hydro controls lake levels and water flow in the Campbell River through three separate dam systems. In the current hot, dry conditions, this system protects fish and fish habitat by maintaining minimum flows within the Campbell River. During wet, stormy periods, flows can be managed to help reduce flood risks.

Because Campbell River has a good supply of water, local watering restrictions are generally based on how much water people use – and the ability of our water system to disinfect and distribute that water. The City's water system (the pipes and pumps that get water to taps in our community) is built to deliver up to 1,065 litres per second of safe drinking water. We allocate 300 litres per second for firefighting, which leaves 765 litres per second for household and business use.

The amount of water used by the community can vary quite a bit throughout the day. Low flows usually occur in the middle of the night, and peak flows typically occur mornings and evenings.

Peak flows help determine whether watering restrictions are needed or not. If the community uses water responsibly, the peak demand for water is well below the City's capacity limit of 765 litres per second.

That's why our community's voluntary reduction in water use enables the City of Campbell River to remain in stage 1 watering restrictions.

Water demand is monitored daily. If we can keep water use at current levels, we should be able to avoid further restrictions. Thanks, Campbell River!

Questions or concerns? Contact Water Wise: 250-203-2316 or water.wise@campbellriver.ca

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