BC Drought Response Plan

Frequently Asked Questions
June 2015

Q. Why do we need a Plan to respond to Drought in B.C.?

- The Drought Response Plan improves communications and coordination of actions taken preceding, during and immediately after a drought and aims to reduce the impacts on people and aquatic ecosystems in times of water scarcity.
- Severe drought conditions have affected parts of B.C. in the past. Because of extremely low snowpacks in some regions and weather projections for warmer and drier than normal conditions in upcoming months, it is anticipated that some regions will likely experience significant water supply shortages in 2015.

Q. What is the purpose of the B.C. Provincial Drought Response Plan?

- The primary purpose of the plan is to guide the coordination and communication of actions taken preceding, during and immediately after a drought. The plan establishes four successive levels of drought that will guide drought response and communication between agencies.
- These science-based Drought Levels provide the basis for an adaptive framework to coordinate response to drought conditions in B.C. for the 2015 season and into the future.

Q. What are the Drought Levels? Are they different from water restrictions?

- The Drought Levels are a common language for describing forecasted or current conditions in a water basin or stream system. Early in the season (January to May) the levels will indicate the potential for drought conditions to occur in a given area. By late June, the likelihood and extent of drought can be fully assessed and Drought Levels will represent actual conditions and forecasts in a given area.
- The Drought Levels set objectives and targets for appropriate response actions. Drought Response actions can range from effective and frequent communication, to voluntary conservation measures, mandatory restrictions and regulatory action.
- The Drought Levels may guide the implementation of water restrictions by local water authorities; however they are not the same thing. Water restrictions are a common way local water providers respond to reduced water availability – encouraging people to use drinking water for high priority uses.

Drought Response Levels Summary

Level	Conditions	Significance	Objective	Target
1 (Green)	Normal Conditions	There is sufficient water to meet human and ecosystem needs	Preparedness	Ongoing reductions in community water use
2 (Yellow)	Dry Conditions	First indications of a potential water supply problem	Voluntary conservation	Minimum 10% reduction
3 (Orange)	Very Dry Conditions	Potentially serious ecosystem or socioeconomic impacts are possible	Voluntary conservation and restrictions	Minimum additional 20% reduction to a minimum total of 30%
4 (Red)	Extremely Dry Conditions	Water supply insufficient to meet socio-economic and ecosystem needs	Voluntary conservation, restrictions and regulatory response	Maximum reduction
Loss of Supply		Potential loss of a community's potable or fire fighting supply	Emergency response	Ensure health and safety

How are the Drought Levels determined?

- The Drought Levels are based on scientific indicators. These indicators assist in determining when to move from one drought level to another in a given area. Core indicators include snow levels, seasonal runoff for river basins, precipitation, and streamflow. This information can provide indications of the general conditions for a water basin.
- Core indicators are also being developed to be applied to streams in specific watersheds. Additional indicators including aquifer levels, trend information, reservoir inflows and wildfire danger ratings may also be considered to help assess drought conditions.

Q. How are the Drought Levels used?

- The Drought Levels are used to streamline communications on drought conditions and risk across the Province. Information bulletins on current or forecasted conditions are distributed widely, providing reliable and useful information.
- Drought Levels may guide the decisions of anyone who uses or distributes water including farmers, water purveyors, and local governments. They also provide a consistent framework for continued development of drought related policies and actions in B.C. Drought Levels and the Drought Level indicators will continue to be subject to technical review and development.

Q. How was the Plan developed?

The Provincial Drought Response Plan was developed on the basis of:

- Feedback from several hundred stakeholders involved in six regional workshops co-sponsored by Ministry of Environment and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada between January and May 2010.

- Scientific advice from the River Forecast Centre and Ministry of Environment key technical staff.
- An extensive review of similar Drought Response plans in place around North America; and
- Input from a post-drought workshop, Kelowna, December 2009.

Q. How has the Province been implementing the plan?

- The Inter-Agency Drought Working Group, led by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, is tasked with the coordination of drought response in BC and has been using the Drought Response Plan. Membership is drawn from key provincial and federal government agencies including: Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Ministry of Health, Emergency Management BC, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture.
- The Inter-Agency Drought Working Group receives advice from a Technical Drought Working Group which links with regional cross-government drought teams with representation from provincial and federal agencies including Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Ministry of Agriculture, and Department of Fisheries and Oceans.