

BC's New Drought Management Action Plan

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Droughts are typically caused by low snowpacks from the previous Winter, hot and dry climatic conditions in the Summer, or a delay in the onset of Fall rains. In the Summer of 2003, southern BC experienced the equivalent of a “perfect storm,” during which all three conditions combined to produce a record drought. The result was extreme fire hazard and scarcity of water for humans, fish, agriculture, and industry.

Hard-hit communities struggled to provide adequate flows: some declared states of emergency; others introduced strict conservation measures, including “stop irrigation” orders for agriculture; and still others had to tap alternate sources. And, unfortunately, the worst may not be over. Even a normal snowpack in Winter 2003 may not adequately recharge groundwater reserves and replenish reservoirs, leaving water supplies vulnerable for 2004, as well.

In response, the provincial Liberals initiated a Drought Management Action Plan with immediate and short-, medium- and long-term actions. Among its short-term goals: to develop a coordinated government-wide response to the

management issues associated with drought, including health, economic, and environmental impacts.

Here are some of the plan's medium- and long-term goals.

- Assess the adequacy of community water supplies for the next Summer (by April 30, 2004) and, where necessary, ask communities and water suppliers to develop “reduced supply” plans in consultation with water users.
- Integrate water-supplier drought-management-response planning into the activities of the provincial Drinking Water Protection Plan.
- Develop a Water Conservation Report Card and implement needed actions in partnership with the public, private, and voluntary sectors.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of water policy, focusing on allocation, use, and conservation.
- Adopt an integrated, watershed-based approach to water management to resolve conflicts among competing water uses.
- Link water availability to local government land-use planning, and growth-management strategies.
- Adopt, with partners, a new governance model for the Okanagan Lake Regulation System.
- Examine the feasibility of moving water users off small streams and onto lakes, to minimize the impacts on fish and fish habitat.

For more information, visit www.lwbc.bc.ca/drought/action_plan.pdf. ▲

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