June 9, 2026

To: Water System Owners/Operators/Purveyors

Re: <u>Preparing for Water Scarcity and Potential Drought Conditions in 2026</u>

Please be advised that drought conditions experienced across the province in recent years may occur again. Drought risk is elevated in many areas of the province due to low snowpack (especially at low elevations), early snowmelt, persistent dry conditions and a seasonal forecast for above normal temperatures. While the risk of summer drought is currently highest for the south coast and southern interior, conditions will greatly depend on weather patterns in the coming months, and we recommend all water suppliers once again prepare for an increased risk of experiencing drought in 2026.

Understanding drought versus water scarcity

Drought and water scarcity are related but distinct concepts that influence water management in different ways.

Drought is a natural climate condition. It occurs when an area experiences an extended period of abnormally dry conditions relative to long-term historical patterns. Drought can be caused by low precipitation, low snowpack, early snowmelt and prolonged hot and dry conditions.

Water scarcity occurs when there is a lack of available water to meet human or ecological needs. It is shaped by both local climate conditions and human influences such as water use and infrastructure capacity. Unlike drought, water scarcity can occur even when conditions are not abnormally dry, especially in watersheds where demand regularly approaches or exceeds available supply.

At the local level, water scarcity depends on factors like source reliability, storage, infrastructure and demand. Local governments and water suppliers are best positioned to assess their own system risks and take appropriate action.

Drought can make water scarcity worse by putting additional pressure on already constrained water supply systems, aquatic ecosystems and community services. Proactive planning, preparedness, monitoring and water management remain critical to strengthening long-term resilience to both drought and water scarcity.

Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Watershed Stewardship and Security Branch
Mailing Address:
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Victoria, BC V8W 9M2
Website: www.gov.bc.ca/WLRS

Take part in the water supply status survey

The Province, in partnership with the Regional Health Authorities is inviting community water suppliers across the province to submit water supply status information through voluntary surveys. The survey is your opportunity to share up-to-date information on the status of your water supply and to let us know if you have any concerns about a potential drinking water shortage.

If you are a community water supplier, we encourage you to take 10-15 minutes to fill out an initial survey and help us understand the state of drinking water supplies as we approach the dry season. Once you have completed the survey the first time, you do not need to fill out the survey again unless your situation or responses change. The survey will be accessible from June to October. You can take part in this survey effort by clicking on the link below:

Drinking Water Supply Status Survey (Click Here)

Survey Information

- There is no option to save the survey and return to it, so please set aside enough time to complete it in one sitting.
- Not all questions are mandatory. Please provide the information you have readily available.
- The survey will work on any web browser (Chrome, Firefox, Edge) except for Internet Explorer.
- The survey can be accessed on mobile devices such as phones and tablets. If you open the survey on your mobile devices and it asks to use your location, please do not allow it to use your location to ensure built-in maps function properly.
- If multiple contacts within your organization have received the survey, please coordinate to provide a single survey response.

By sharing this information with the Province, we can better assess which communities are at risk of water supply issues, and where support may be needed if drought occurs or worsens.

Stay informed about current drought conditions and water scarcity risks

The Province's drought preparation and response webpage has several online resources to support water suppliers through drought conditions. Each year, the Province updates B.C.'s operational plan for drought and water scarcity, which provides an overview of the provincial role in drought monitoring and water scarcity management. Please look for the updated 2026 plan on the BC drought information webpage later this Spring.

To understand water scarcity risks, it is important to regularly monitor local conditions. The Province produces datasets to support local water scarcity risk assessments including:

- the Drought Portal that displays provincial drought levels, streamflow, groundwater levels and information on risks to aquatic ecosystems, and
- a Map of 7-Day Average Streamflow that displays Water Survey of Canada streamflow gauges relevant to your area.

Provincial drought levels provide information about how dry conditions are, and how often these dry conditions may recur, at broad scales only. They cannot tell you if your system will be impacted or is at risk of being impacted as this depends on the resilience of each water supply system in times of drought.

Improve resilience to water scarcity, drought and other hazards

Actions you can take to better prepare for water scarcity, drought and other hazards include:

- **Get to know your water source:** The new Drinking Water Sources Dataset is now publicly available as an interactive online map on the provincial Source Water webpage. This new dataset brings together information on drinking water sources including location information on drinking water systems, intakes and wellheads, along with the protection zones and the source areas that supply them. The initial release includes approximately 1350 systems, with ongoing updates planned as additional systems are validated.
- **Establish a water supply monitoring program:** If your water sources (raw water storage and inflows or groundwater levels) are not gauged, consider establishing a water supply monitoring program, which will enable you to measure the water available and adjust water use accordingly. Understanding the status of your water supply can help to anticipate future water scarcity and improve drought resilience. Professional consultants can help design an appropriate monitoring program for your system.
- **Prepare/update a water conservation plan:** Preparing a water conservation plan or updating a plan that is more than five years old is also recommended. This Water Conservation Guide provides a resource on creating these plans. A water conservation plan can help you develop, or update, a water conservation bylaw, which can set out watering restrictions seasonally or in stages, based on projections of water availability. Public outreach and communication can also be an effective tool to explain why water conservation matters and how people can contribute.
- **Prepare/update an emergency response and contingency plan:** As a water licence holder, you hold rights and responsibilities under the *Water Sustainability Act* and must also comply with other applicable legislation. For example, section

10 of the *Drinking Water Protection Act* (DWPA) requires all water suppliers to have a written emergency response and contingency plan (ERCP) to be implemented in the event of an emergency or abnormal operational circumstances. Having an updated ERCP that includes drought response actions will help ensure water systems are prepared to deal with water shortages. Guidance on preparing and ERCP is available in the Emergency Response and Contingency Planning for Small Water Systems and also the Guide to Emergency Response and Contingency Plans for Water Supply Systems. For questions about the DWPA and ERCPs, please contact your Drinking Water Officer (DWO) at the applicable email address: [HA to insert regionally specific contact information]

- **Plan for the long term and future:** All water suppliers are encouraged to ensure effective and efficient operations of their works to help mitigate against the potential impacts of drought. When planning for capital projects, consider projects to support drought resilience such as leakage reduction, universal water metering, increased raw water storage and development of secondary or back-up water sources.
- **Share key drought and water management resources:** Distribute the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's Quick Guide to Drought Resources, a two-page summary of agricultural water-related supports, to agricultural water users. Encourage agricultural communities to subscribe to AgriService B.C.'s monthly Regional E-bulletins for timely, region-specific updates on programs, events, and resources.

Keep up-to-date on the latest guidance available to you

You may already be aware that there are resources to help you fulfil your responsibilities as a water supplier. Many of these resources can be accessed through the Resources for Water System Operators webpage, the BC Small Water Systems Online Help Centre and the BCWWA Small Water Systems Community Network.

We recognize that water suppliers are facing many challenges in addition to drought and water scarcity, and we appreciate the efforts you are making to plan ahead and continue providing essential services to your communities.

Thank you for your cooperation and attention to preparing for drought this year.

Sincerely,

[Sign off]