

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CVRD Urging Residents to Conserve Water

Duncan, BC - The east coast of the Cowichan region and in particular the Cowichan watershed is facing what may potentially be the lowest water levels on record, and the Cowichan Valley Regional District is urging residents to conserve water in light of the exceptionally dry conditions this year. Little rainfall this spring combined with a low snowpack has led to the water levels in Cowichan Lake being at about 60% of what is needed to maintain regular river flows to the end of the dry season. In an effort to ensure a sufficient flow of water in the Cowichan River until fall rains come, river flows have been reduced from the minimum 7 cubic metres per second to 5 cubic metres per second.

While wells drawing from the lower Cowichan and Koksilah aquifers are not currently threatened, the impacts of low flows on the Cowichan River are serious. Low summer water levels put salmon, trout, and steelhead populations at risk and threaten closure of the Catalyst pulp and paper mill. These low levels also mean less water reaching the aquifer that supplies Duncan, North Cowichan and other communities in the Cowichan Basin, and less water to dilute treated sewage discharges in the river. In response to these challenges, considerable resources from the provincial government, local governments, Catalyst, Cowichan Tribes, local stewardship groups and others have been dedicated to address these issues:

- CVRD, Duncan, North Cowichan, Ladysmith and Lake Cowichan have implemented either Stage 2 or 3 watering restrictions;
- Catalyst Paper has challenged its 600 person workforce to conserve even more water;
- The Cowichan Watershed Board has challenged local governments and residents across the region to conserve water;
- Local authorities are monitoring sewage discharge into the river closely;
- The Ministry of Environment and Island Health are increasing water quality monitoring where needed;
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada is monitoring the Cowichan River closely and, with Cowichan Tribes, preparing to truck salmon to spawning grounds should this become necessary;
- Local volunteer stewardship groups are actively working to free juvenile fish from side channels and pools and return them to the main stem of the river; and
- A contingency plan is being prepared that would see water pumped from Cowichan Lake over the weir in order to maintain sufficient flows in the river;

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