



For Immediate Release

**City of Merritt
Information Release**

August 22, 2019 at 1:30pm
Re: Coldwater Basin Drought – Watering Restrictions

The Coldwater river has the driest water basin in British Columbia and to minimize environmental impacts, the Province has been working closely with the City to determine additional avenues to reduce water consumption.

At the City, the following steps have now been implemented to reduce water use:

- As of 1:00pm today, the Rotary Spray Park has been turned off
- Ceased irrigation in all parks and the cemetery, including flower beds
- Ceased street sweeping and washing roadways
- Ceased washing all company vehicles
- Transferred our lead well pumps to pull residential drinking water from the Nicola aquifer as opposed to the Coldwater aquifer

Effective Monday, August 26th, **no residential lawn watering or car washing is permitted in the City of Merritt**. This applies whether watering is done through automatic irrigation, controlled sprinklers, or by hand. **No exceptions will be issued** for lawn watering or car washing.

Vegetable gardens may still be watered once per week using automatic irrigation or controlled sprinklers (Tuesday for odd numbered addresses and Friday for even numbered addresses). Additionally, vegetables and flowers may be watered by hand as required, so long as a controlled flow nozzle is used.

The Province has provided the City with the following information, to better help residents understand the reason why these additional restrictions are necessary:

Groundwater pumping from shallow wells can reduce the amount of groundwater that flows to the Coldwater River. Shallow groundwater in aquifers and surface water are generally interconnected in the Coldwater, and drawing down water in wells may cause water levels in neighbouring streams to drop as well, potentially impacting ecosystems and other water users.

Groundwater levels naturally vary on a seasonal basis, and are affected by the amount of “recharge” that the aquifer receives during the wet season, as well as the pumping of wells that extract water from the aquifer.

Information from Provincial Observation Well No. 296 at Merritt is showing a lower than normal groundwater level for this time of year.

Further information on groundwater levels in provincial observation wells can be found at:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/groundwater-wells-aquifers/groundwater-observation-well-network/groundwater-level-data-interactive-map>

"This is a drastic step, but one we have to take", said Chief Administrative Officer, Scott Hildebrand. "We've been working closely with the Province regarding water restrictions since July, but the situation in the Coldwater River basin remains dire. The discharge level has halved since the start of August, and we are hovering around the critical environmental flow threshold of 0.43m³/s. "

Mayor Linda Brown states, "The Coldwater is not our only source of water, and we have increased the proportion we're pulling from the Nicola river. This allows us to tell residents that they can continue to water vegetable gardens, so they don't lose the home produce they've been working on for months. However, starting Monday, we will be looking for people using water on lawns, and we will be enforcing our bylaw and policy."

"As a City we're going to follow the same rules as everyone else. We wanted to keep our parks beautiful and the Spray Park operational for as long as possible, but we cannot in good conscience maintain this position given the circumstances we are in, despite the public benefit we know these resources provide."

For information on water levels in BC, see

<https://governmentofbc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=838d533d8062411c820eef50b08f7ebc>

For information on the Coldwater river level at the Merritt monitoring station, see

https://wateroffice.ec.gc.ca/report/real_time_e.html?stn=08LG010

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