

Doing our part to save water

The comprehensive watering ban (Level 4 Water Conservation) is a completely different operational mode for the City of Parksville, something not experienced. It is the converse of an extreme snow and ice control situation. There have been a record number of water main breaks because of thermal expansion also causing sidewalks to heave and tripping hazards to appear overnight.

Conservation now allows the City to bridge the needs of August, September and into October until the fall/winter rains start again. This is the first time the City has had to move to Level 4 Water Conservation and staff is adjusting to this new operational mode. All irrigation which can be shut off without causing permanent damage to our assets has been shut down. At this time, the City is prepared to lose perennials and shrubs but not major trees.

With a small number of staff over the past ten days, the City is making the modifications necessary to adjust to a comprehensive watering ban, recognizing there is only so much that can be done without jeopardizing infrastructure. Monitoring is a big part of what happens next. There are some areas with significant trees which are no longer receiving irrigation.

The City has purchased about 180 gator or tree bags which are being filled with non-potable water by the City's water truck. The bags allow the water to slowly seep from the bag applying water to the root zone of the newer tree. These bags work well for newer trees; mature trees have a fibrous root system which extends well out from the base of the tree so the tree bags do not work as well. Trees are already stressed from this year's drought. Further signs of failing health in a tree can take a year or more to show up – this year's drought conditions will be even more visible next year.

Boulevard grass areas for the most part have been turned off except where irrigation is in common with trees and ornamental shrubs. Irrigation zones on the highway were installed in the 1980's and extend for long distances. An area of grass can be connected to trees and shrubs in front of adjacent businesses in the same watering zone. Most of these zones have now been shut off and the City will now monitor the trees and shrubs to hopefully prevent extreme tree stress or death of the trees.

There are about 80 separate irrigation systems in the City with up to 30 zones per system. Each zone may have up to 50 or more heads. Adjustments and repairs are made early in the morning when areas are less busy (an example would be in the Community Park). A twist of the foot or a mower running over the irrigation head may change the direction of the spray causing overspray on unwanted areas. Adjustments are extremely time consuming and challenging and often involve rebuilding of certain areas.

The City will continue to water sports fields. In 2013, through a federal government grant, the fields were resurfaced at a cost of about \$350,000. Because the fields are sand based and have a shallow root zone, the grass would die very quickly and would not recover. Organic seaweed base will be applied to the Community Park sports fields. This emulsion will allow less capillary action on the lawn surface and allow quicker absorption of irrigated water and therefore less water.

The kite field is not being watered and will need substantial repair in the spring. Waterpark hours have been reduced to 11 am to 5 pm from 9 am to 7 pm in order to save water.

Non-potable water is being used from an irrigation well in the industrial park area to water trees and planters. The City will now work to reuse the flushing of the river station in such areas as the Pym Street Canada Flag display. One of the challenges is not enough time in the week to water all of the areas by hand. Over the next few weeks, adjustments will be made by the City to manage and protect the investments made in City parks over the past many years.

Water has been turned off to outer parks, except where it is possible to water the tree zone only. The City's parks department are monitoring the trees for stress. The off-leash dog park is being watered primarily to save the immature trees which are not yet established. This is a high impact area which would need to be closed for remediation.

Areas without trees along the Island Highway (lawns, rose bushes, shrubs) have been shut down and will be monitored. Irrigation is still on in some areas with trees such as traffic islands where it is difficult and dangerous to fill water bags. Other areas have been shut off and the trees will be monitored or gator bagged. Grass/lawn areas at the Parksville Civic and Technology Centre including the area between PCTC and Stanford Place have been shut down entirely. Trees have had gator bags added to them if they are in lawn areas or the trees will be monitored for signs of stress.

About 150,000 gallons (550 m³) of water is being saved per day with the measures taken so far. The City is managing a system which has never seen such measures. With the public's help, the City is able to monitor what is happening in parks and green spaces which cover hundreds of acres in Parksville. The City would like residents to understand they are doing its best to manage this water crisis and it does appreciate constructive support.

Information about Level 4 Water Conservation and the new regional Water Saver Contest through Team WaterSmart is available on the City's website <http://parksville.ca/cms.asp?wpID=377>

For more information:

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