

Metro Vancouver reservoirs ready for summer

Snowpack is below normal, but water storage levels in main lakes are nearly at full capacity

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 28, 2015



The Capilano watershed reservoir behind Cleveland Dam in North Vancouver is at 99 per cent of full summer storage capacity.

Photograph by: ian lindsay, VANCOUVER SUN

METRO VANCOUVER -- A lower-than-normal snowpack isn't expected to seriously affect Metro Vancouver's water supply this summer, but regional officials have secured the right to take more water from the Coquitlam reservoir just in case.

A staff report suggests the region should have enough water in its Seymour, Capilano and Coquitlam reservoirs, as well as its alpine lakes, to serve the population this year, despite a snowpack in the South Coast Mountains that is 13 per cent below normal and spring run-off expected to be "well below normal."

The report noted the Capilano reservoir is already at 99 per cent of full summer storage capacity, and Seymour Lake at 87 per cent, with all alpine lakes at 100 per cent. Both the Seymour and Capilano, as well as the Coquitlam reservoir, which is owned by BC Hydro, should be at 100 per cent of full summer storage capacity by early May, the report states.

Darrell Mussatto, head of Metro's utilities committee, insisted that while the snowpack is important, the region's water supply also relies on summer rainfall to boost the water levels in three reservoirs. But if by chance there is a drought, Metro also has the option to buy more water from BC Hydro, which owns the large Coquitlam reservoir, he said.

Metro Vancouver usually asks BC Hydro to set aside a specific amount of water each year. In 2014, it

was 50,000 million litres, worth \$630,000. This year, Metro has requested 68,200 million litres, which would cost \$862,000. The regional district is also working to revise its licence agreements with BC Hydro in order to secure a greater supply of drinking water for the future.

“Our long-term plan is to secure more capacity,” said Mussatto, who is also mayor of North Vancouver City.

Mussatto noted Metro Vancouver hasn’t experienced a major water shortage since 1992, when restrictions were in place for 10 days. In July 2009, the region also experienced such high demand for water that it stretched the ability of the regional transmission system to meet minimum service levels, particularly in the southern and eastern parts of the region — both of which are geographically furthest from the reservoirs and experiencing the fastest growth in population.

Since then, stringent summer lawn-sprinkling restrictions and measures such as low-flush toilets have helped to relieve the pressure on the water supply, Mussatto said, along with a move to create denser communities, where people live in condos or apartments and have less land to tend.

The report notes the per capita use of water in Metro has been dropping, but the overall population increase means the overall use is still up, mainly in suburban areas across the region.

“The less dense areas require more water,” said Mussatto. “(The report) shows that before the regulations we were using a lot of water — people were just dumping it.”

Cities around the world have to start getting more serious about conserving water, especially as the climate continues to warm and the population increases, said David Scott, associate professor for Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of B.C. in the Okanagan.

“With the impact of climate change, there will be more unpredictability in the weather ... in general, the water resources are going to be under more strain going into the future,” Scott said.

But, he noted, cities can adapt by building more water storage facilities and providing better conservation measures.

“Really, in many other places ... they’ll be learning those lessons,” he said.

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