

# Dry spring prompts low-water advisory

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FINCH - Three months of below average rainfall has prompted South Nation Conservation to issue a Level 1 low-water advisory for the New Dublin-to-Plantagenet watershed.

"It indicates a water supply problem may be occurring," SNC resources technician Lisa Migneault told The Recorder and Times on Wednesday.

Migneault said precipitation for March, April and May was less than 80 per cent of the historic average.

She said those results led to the low-water advisory being issued, along with suggestions for people to voluntarily conserve water.

If there is enough rainfall in June to raise the rolling three-month average above 80 per cent, the advisory could be lifted, she said.

"Over the next week we're supposed to get rain, but the rest of the month is up in the air," said Migneault, noting the projections are based on data from Environment Canada models.

On the other hand, June and July typically see plenty of rainfall, especially in recent years, and a repeat of that situation would help alleviate the problem, she said.

She said low-level water advisories are normally reserved for later in the season and the early warning of potential problems is worrisome.

"Historically, when we have declared Level 1 and Level 11 advisory, it's always been in September and October," said Migneault, noting conservation authorities have been mandated to issue warnings about aberrant water levels since 2000.

Ground-water reservoirs are also badly in need of a good soaking to increase levels, she noted.

"It's not life-threatening at this point, but it is a concern," she said.

She said water levels in the watershed are below normal but are still considered adequate if the supply is replenished with rainfall.

In the meantime, people are

encouraged to conserve water in a variety of ways.

If they must water the lawn, do so early in the morning or late in the evening to reduce evaporation, said Migneault.

Similarly, washing a vehicle should be done with a pail of soapy water followed by a quick rinse with a hose.

She further suggested collecting rain water in a barrel for watering plants, as well as repairing water leaks around a home.

Homeowners may also participate in a water efficiency program that encourages conservation by providing water-efficient devices at no cost by calling 613-938-3611, ext. 228.

Neighbouring conservation authorities are also monitoring the situation on their watersheds.

Patrick Larson, senior water resources technician with the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority, said water levels are a concern throughout most of eastern Ontario.

Larson said the Rideau River system, which extends from Kingston to Ottawa and flows through northern parts of Leeds and Grenville, is below normal for this time of year, but hasn't fallen to levels typically seen during the driest months of summer in July and August.

Moreover, precipitation for the past three months is 76 per cent of historic averages, according to five stations in eastern Ontario, he added.

But Larson said rainfall recorded at Brockville, where precipitation has remained closer to historic levels, distorts the three-month average to appear more favourable.

Removing the Brockville precipitation figures reduces the average to about 50 per cent of the three-month average, he said.

In fact, precipitation across the region has been lower than normal since December, creating the water-deficit situation, said Larson.

He said the recent rainfall helps and the forecast for some added rain this week is encouraging.

However, if it is a repeat of last month when rain fell early in May and then disappeared for

several weeks, the situation will remain a concern, he said.

Larson said the authority will continue to monitor precipitation and water levels and will consider options, depending on the situation later in June.

"We're not pushing any panic buttons," said Larson.

Nevertheless, people are encouraged to practice conservation measures, he said.

Meanwhile, the website for the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority, which has jurisdiction over the Lyn Creek and Brockville's Back Pond and Buell's Creek, indicates water levels and precipitation is being monitored.

However, there are no notices or advisories listed. Water levels spokesman Mara Shaw could not be reached for comment.

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