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THURSDAY APRIL 12, 2012



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QUESTION OF THE WEEK




Do you agree with the federal government's passage of Bill C-19, that lead to the abolition of the federal gun registry and having the records destroyed?

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Why Cranbrook tries to conserve water

FROM A TRICKLE TO A ROAR: PART THREE


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AUGUST 2, 2011

SALLY MACDONALD
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Here in Cranbrook, we have not one, but two basins to draw water from.

The Gold Creek and Joseph Creek watersheds are large and they supply a torrent of water that is turned into our drinking water.

What's more, the city has built a "redundant" water supply, explained Joe McGowan, director of public works.

Three wells scattered around the city draw about one million gallons of water a day each, for a total of three million gallons a day. We don't use those wells, McGowan said, unless we can't access the water in Phillips Reservoir.

In winter, Cranbrook goes through on average 2.7 million gallons of water a day. So those wells more than cover the basic water needs of the city.

In summer, though, that number peaks at around 10 million gallons of water a day.

"If you look at the facts and figures we have here, it's cookie cutter from year to year. Come April and the first part of May, you'll start to see the water use peak. That's when people start to get outside and use their water. It kind of tapers off towards the end of September," said Chris Zettel, the city's corporate communications officer.

Still, Phillips Reservoir holds 500 million imperial gallons of water, and it's kept at that level year round. What's more, upstream at the city's diversion structure, in July around 4,242 imperial gallons a minute are diverted away from the reservoir because the city doesn't need them.

So, if Cranbrook seemingly has an abundant supply of water, why are we urged to preserve every unnecessary drop?

"There are a whole bunch of reasons why we conserve water," said McGowan.

McGowan said we should get into the habit of protecting our most precious resource.



City of Cranbrook photo

Replace an old toilet with a new low-flow toilet and the city will give you \$50.

Related Links:

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"A culture of conservation addresses a great deal of issues. You create a culture where people are not using something because it is there, but because they need it," he said.

"If we have a culture of conservation, when we go through dry years, we won't have to cut back."

In Cranbrook, the water distribution system - the pipes, essentially - is designed to service 60,000 people.

According to BC Stats, last year Cranbrook had a population of 19,123.

That means we can handle roughly three times the water use before those very expensive pipes have to be upsized.

"When we design a water system, we design it based on domestic use, plus fire protection. If we are using a lot of water for domestic use, we still have to provide fire flow. We end up having to upsize the pipes, and we have to treat the water," said McGowan.

Currently, Cranbrook's water is pure enough that it doesn't need to be treated. Only chlorine and fluoride are added.

"If you conserve water, you don't have to have huge pipes and a treatment plant," said McGowan. "If we stay at this level or conserve more, we can take the threshold before we do anything way above 60,000 (population)."

Water conservation requires an attitude shift, said Zettel.

"This program is hopefully more behavioural and getting people to really think about it.

"If the time comes that suddenly we're struggling with the amount of water we have, maybe there won't be as much of a shock and people scrambling to change their habits."

We may have an abundance of water, here and now, but in other parts of the world that's not the case.

"You hear in the media that water will eventually become more valuable than oil," said Zettel. "We are one of the few very fortunate regions in the province, in the country, in the world, that has this abundance of water. Personally, I think we have a responsibility to care for that, and the water that we use, to use exactly what we need and try not to waste it."

There are plenty of things you can do at home to conserve water. See Thursday's Townsman for the conclusion of From A Trickle To A Roar.

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