



Media Release

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Change required for City of Vernon release of treated reclaimed water

The City of Vernon is preparing for a change at the Vernon Water Reclamation Centre (VWRC) and its release of high-quality reclaimed water following the treatment process.

Presently, the VWRC receives and treats approximately 13 million litres of influent every day, which is mostly domestic and commercial in nature, but also includes industrial wastewater. Following an advanced reclamation process, including the use of primary, secondary and tertiary levels of treatment, most of the reclaimed water (more than 98%) is piped to MacKay Reservoir, located 10 km from the VWRC. MacKay Reservoir is on Commonage Road. The rest of the reclaimed water is piped to The Rise Golf Course, where it is used for irrigation.

Reclaimed water from MacKay Reservoir is used to irrigate local golf courses, ball diamonds, soccer pitches, agricultural land used for grazing and hay production, two seed orchards, a seedling nursery and other tree plantations.

The irrigation programs are permitted by the Ministry of Environment and allow the City to reuse valuable water resources and provide a unique service to land owners in the North Okanagan region.

“The highly treated reclaimed water irrigation program has a long history in Vernon, and the City is proud of our ability to irrigate local agricultural and recreational lands while reusing this precious and irreplaceable resource,” said Mayor Victor Cumming. “The City is committed to continuing the spray irrigation programs for reclaimed water and is regularly looking for opportunities to expand or adjust the program to make it even better.”

During the last four years (2017 – 2020), due to factors outside the City’s control, there has been a significant reduction in the use of reclaimed water from MacKay Reservoir. Factors include: wet weather in spring and summer; cooler temperatures; increased cloud cover; smoke from wildfires; and atypical rainfall. With all of these contributing factors, the use of reclaimed water was reduced in order to prevent oversaturation of the pasture and crop lands and recreation areas.

In early 2020, MacKay Reservoir was nearing its maximum storage capacity elevation (1939 feet above sea level, or fasl). For the first time in more than 20 years, the City of Vernon had to

temporarily redirect the discharge of treated reclaimed water from the VWRC to Okanagan Lake via a deep lake outfall, with the intention of using the 2020 summer irrigation program to draw down the reservoir to a more manageable level. Unfortunately, a higher than average snowpack last winter and extremely wet weather in the spring and early summer prohibited the City from operating its irrigation program to the extent anticipated.

Once hot summer weather that is more typical for the North Okanagan began in July, the irrigation program was able to operate at full capacity. However, the level of the reservoir at the end of the allowable discharge period was not low enough to avoid another discharge this year.

Therefore, MacKay Reservoir is once again nearing its maximum storage capacity elevation and the City of Vernon will be required to discharge reclaimed water to Okanagan Lake, starting this month. The City is working with the Province to determine when the discharge will end.

Under the City's Operating Certificate issued by the Ministry of Environment, the City is permitted to redirect the flow of treated reclaimed water from the VWRC directly to Okanagan Lake, via a deep lake outfall, when there are unforeseen circumstances that do not allow the City to draw down the water in MacKay Reservoir.

The deep lake outfall is located 7 km southwest of Kin Beach, is approximately 1.5 – 2 km from either shore, and is 60 m below the water surface. Reclaimed water from the VWRC meets all requirements of our Operating Certificate issued by the Ministry of Environment, and has been treated to protect the ecosystem within Okanagan Lake and its surrounding area.

While this situation requires a change in operation for the VWRC, reclaimed water discharge is not an uncommon practice in the Okanagan Valley. Currently, communities located along Okanagan Lake (including the City of Kelowna, City of West Kelowna, District of Peachland, District of Summerland and City of Penticton) discharge the majority of their treated reclaimed water to Okanagan Lake or adjacent water courses every day.

To learn more about the water reclamation process in Vernon, please visit the City's website at vernon.ca/water-reclamation. A video describes the treatment process and provides an inside look at the Water Reclamation Centre. The VWRC also welcomes the opportunity to provide tours to interested members of the public, with COVID-19 safety protocols in place, when allowed under BC Public Health Orders.