



REQUEST FOR DIRECTION

Meeting: July 14th, 2025

Outdoor Watering Schedule

BACKGROUND:

Drought conditions in the region over the last few years have led to lower levels in Pine Coulee Reservoir and the implementation of the Town's Water Shortage Response Plan (WSRP). The plan was in effect for most of 2023 and at the start of summer in 2024, which were the first years of water restrictions since the Town began utilizing Pine Coulee for its water supply. Council is considering an outdoor watering schedule for Claresholm as a water conservation tool for periods when water levels are favorable and Claresholm is not in water restrictions. The WSRP and a potential outdoor watering schedule are separate water conservation processes.

DISCUSSION/OPTIONS:

Several municipalities in the province have implemented Watering Schedules, including Okotoks, Stavelly, Airdrie, Strathmore, St. Albert, Red Deer and Diamond Valley. Common features of Watering Schedules include:

Seasonal Timing: Typically enforced from April/May through September/October, however some appear to have watering schedules year-round.

Odd/Even Days: Watering is allowed only on days matching the last digit of your house (odd/even).

Time-of-Day Windows: Early morning and/or evening periods (e.g. 6 a.m.–9 a.m., 7 p.m.–10 p.m.).

Exemptions: Common for hand-watering, new lawns, edible gardens, and drip irrigation.

Stage-Based Restrictions: Cities like Red Deer use multi-stage systems that tighten rules during drought.

Bylaw Enforcement: Typically codified and enforced via bylaw.

Municipalities implement watering schedules for different reasons. Some municipalities have limited access to water, or limited ability to treat water, others might be seeking to balance growth and development with limited access to water, while others cite changing climates and a desire to increase stewardship and responsible water use. Here are some examples of municipal watering schedules:

Municipality Option A: mandatory water conservation in effect between May 1 and September 30 every year.

- Governed by bylaw
 - Contains enforcement and penalty provisions
- Odd/even number homes water on odd/even calendar days
- Watering of lawns, gardens, streets, yards or grounds between the hours of 12:00pm and 7:00pm, is prohibited
- Hand watering every day of the week, anytime of day permitted
- Residents with new sod or seeded lawns may water their lawns daily for up to 6 weeks provided they do not water between the hours of noon and 7:00pm.
- Water Conservation Rebate Program
 - Rebates for water conservation efforts: toilets, low-flow shower heads, rain barrel, mulch, drought tolerant trees and shrubs, drought tolerant ground cover, soaker hoses
- Contains enforcement and penalties provisions (wasting treated water \$500, water use outside guidelines \$250)

Municipality Option B: has a mandatory, year-round watering schedule (until restrictions are called)

- Established via 'waterworks bylaw'
- Odd and evens scheduling in effect, 3 days/week
- Exemption permit in place for new sod, or grass
- Logic for Watering Limits: *Water is a finite resource that needs to be protected. The Bow Glacier that feeds the Bow and Elbow Rivers has experienced significant depletion over the past few decades. The City gets water from Calgary, who sources it from these rivers. Watering during the scheduled times (early in the morning or late at night) will reduce evaporation and allow water to soak into the soil and reach grass and plant roots.*

Municipality Option C: 'normal water use' (not into restrictions) odd numbered houses on Sundays and Thursdays, even numbered houses on Saturdays and Wednesdays, between hours of 6 am to 9am or 7pm to 10pm

- Also has a water restrictions guide
- Governed via Outdoor Water Use and Restriction Bylaw
- Logic on website: *With the threat of drought conditions and water shortages across parts of Alberta, High River's Town Council has approved an Outdoor Water Use and Restriction Bylaw. The bylaw encourages the wise use of water, and outlines High River's water use and restrictions, to ensure they build resilience to the impacts of the changing climate. It encourages residents to use water wisely and sets out clear water use and restrictions. It also outlines penalties for not following the rules in place to protect our water resources.*

The Town determines outdoor water restriction level based on various factors. These include the condition of the aquifers and wells used by the community, ensuring sufficient water reserves for firefighting purposes, environmental sustainability and resource protection, adherence to water quality standards, and infrastructure capabilities.

It is difficult to estimate the effect that outdoor watering has on the supply of water in Pine Coulee Reservoir. However, metered yearly water readings for the Town from 2019 to 2022 show an average use of 530, 886 m³. When restrictions were imposed in 2023, the Town used 484, 272 m³, a difference of 46, 614 m³ from the average. For reference, there is 5 million m³ of storage between elevations of 1047.5m and 1046m, when levels reach 1046 we enter Stage 1 of water restrictions.

Other Considerations:

- The peak demand for water is in the hot summer months, which places increased stress on the water treatment plant. An outdoor watering schedule would reduce stress on the plant.
- Public appetite for a watering schedule and enforcement concerns
- Is council interested in a water conservation rebate program?

RECOMMENDATION:

If Council would like to implement a watering schedule, administration recommends modelling the Innisfail schedule.

POSSIBLE MOTION:

Moved by Councillor _____ to direct administration to prepare an amended Water and Sewer Utility Bylaw to include provisions for an Outdoor Watering Schedule as outlined in Option A (or as directed).