

Aston irrigation

ASSOCIATION

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- Interruptible vs. Non-Interruptible Allocations
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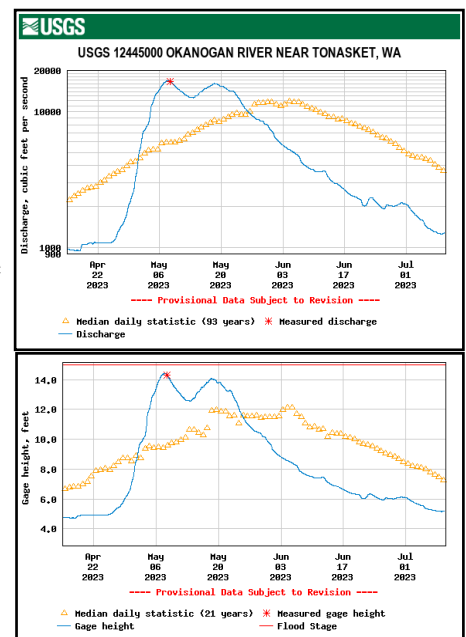
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Statewide Drought Advisory Issued

The Washington Department of Ecology issued a statewide drought advisory this month. While Okanogan County has not yet reached the stage to be officially labeled as “in drought” ([Okanogan County, WA | U.S. Drought Monitor \(unl.edu\)](https://www.drought.gov/monitor/county/okanogan-wa)), stream conditions in the Okanogan have been abnormally low for this time of year. Although we here in Okanogan experienced a long, snow-filled, will-it-ever-go-away-winter, our neighbors to the north, where our river water originates, did not. This directly affects Aston Estates irrigation water users as the Department of Ecology has begun issuing orders to reduce water consumption from the river. Washington water, as with most of the West, adheres to the “first in time first in right” concept in water law. If those not familiar, that means the oldest rights (“senior”) take precedence over any rights obtained later (“junior”).



<https://dashboard.waterdata.usgs.gov/>

What Does This Mean to Me? Interruptible vs. Non-Interruptible

These different levels of rights are often referred to as “non-interruptible” and “interruptible” allocations for water users. During periods of low water such as these, **allocations labeled “interruptible” are not to be utilized.** This is our “Yellow Flag” status. Letters were sent to all users identifying reductions or eliminations required due to a recent order by DOE.

Aston Irrigation Association has worked, and continues to work, diligently to purchase senior water rights to ensure members have the best chance of maintaining irrigation during low water years. However, AIA does still retain some junior rights that are subject to reduction or elimination.

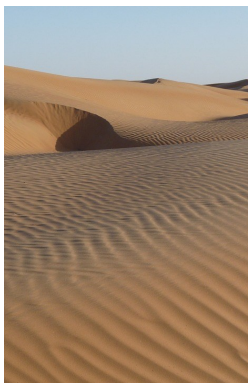


Why are My Rights “Interruptible”?

Whether or not your property came with “interruptible” or “non-interruptible” water rights may not have been up to you. As one of the newer neighborhoods in Omak, the original irrigation water purchases were made up of mainly junior water rights. Over the years, the past boards worked with property owners up and downstream to purchase senior rights from older properties, often in ex-

change for our junior rights. Aston property owners at the time typically had the option to buy-in to this swap, but not every property owner did. Further, some properties were divided and built after these purchases were made. Unfortunately, this means you may have a property with only an interruptible allocation. AIA is actively working to obtain additional senior rights.

*Sand is great
for the beach
but a challenge
for vegetation.*



Living on Sand: How to Make the Most of Your Water

We live on sand. News to you, right? The soil we live on is named “Ewall Loamy Fine Sand”. Yes, soil has names. While sand has substantial benefits, there are also substantial drawbacks when it comes to growing things.

The Benefits

The biggest benefit of our sandy soils is that vegetation is able to easily and quickly uptake water and nutrients. Unlike finer soils, sand does not tightly bind to water and nutrients, so plants can take advantage of whatever passes their roots rather quickly. Applications of nitrogen and other nutrients in the form of compost or commercial fertilizers can be utilized quickly, you have probably noticed the rapid response.

For an in-depth look at the soils we live on, their properties, and capabilities, visit Web Soil Survey at <https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>.

Water—Less is More

The biggest pitfall of living on sand is the rapidity through which water travels. What we live on is defined as “excessively drained” and has a water holding capacity of approximately 3 inches within the first 5 feet. What does this mean? With a water transmissibility speed well above 15 inches per hour, the most water storage you can possibly achieve within 5 feet is around 3 inches, no matter how much you water. While it is nice not to have puddles everywhere when we do get rain, it also means that you cannot build a reserve of water in the soil. This soil we live on is also highly erodible by wind and water.

More water is not better.

Living on Sand—Making the Most of Nutrients

To Fertilize or Not to Fertilize

The water transmissibility of sand means that anything you put on the surface—such as fertilizer—is going to be pushed down through the soil profile with the addition of water. If you apply excessive water after fertilizing, all nutrients are down past where plants can get to it. While sand also makes an excellent filter, remember that anything going through the soil ultimately ends up in the ground water—which makes up our neighborhood drinking water.

An Impossible Situation?

At this point you may be thinking “I give up!”. But, there are solutions. First and foremost, small applications of water frequently can provide for your plants. Water when evaporation is low (morning, evening, night), set your timers to run 10-20 minutes every 8-12 hours. A short “cooling off” spray in the heat of the day is preferred to a longer soaking particularly for gardens.

It is best to base the type and amount of fertilizer applied on a soil test. Home tests are easy to find and easy to use. You might be surprised what you discover and save yourself money in the long run. You might also consider utilizing different types of fertilizer, such as compost that includes micro-nutrients and releases slower than pelleted commercial forms.

Turn Sand Into Soil

Adding compost and organic matter into gardens and lawns increases water holding capacity as well as providing food for the microbes that are critical to building soil. Adding a mulch layer can further reduce evaporation and increase water holding capacity. Just be careful to leave space between trunks of trees or shrubs and the mulch to prevent disease.



*Healthy soil
looks like cake,
not flour.*

Financial Assistance Programs for Conservation

If you have a garden or pasture you are grazing or haying, you may want to contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). An agency under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, they offer technical and financial assistance programs for conservation related items such as high tunnels (aka hoop houses), micro-irrigation systems, sprinklers, and interior fences for grazing. The local service center for our area is:

1251 2nd Ave South, Suite 101
Okanogan, WA 98840
(509) 422-2750
www.nrcs.usda.gov

