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Water Open Data: Is there a data drought?

Posted on 2016-08-19 by ottawa

I like to support roadside farm stands. Fresh, affordable local produce is a benefit of the summer in the Ottawa Valley. During a recent visit to my favourite stand, I overheard the operators lamenting the current drought we are experiencing in the Ottawa area. Their well was running dry. They were hauling water from the Ottawa River to provide underwhelming relief to their crops.

The City of Ottawa tweeted the next day that there were severe drought conditions for the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (Ottawa West and beyond). My interest was piqued. What open data is available for Ottawa area farmers related to water conditions from the three levels of government: local, provincial and national?

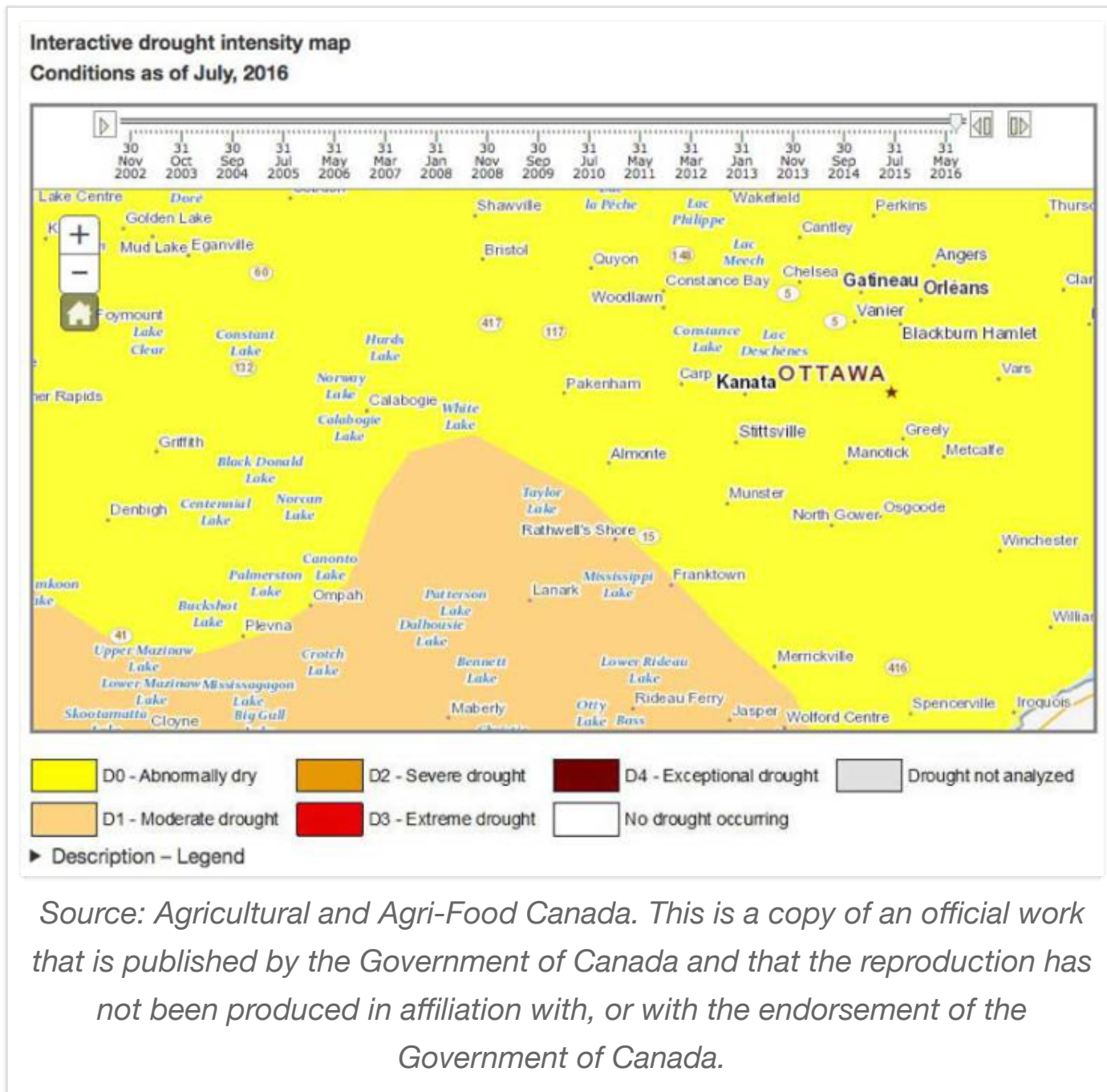
I started at the local level with the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA). Their website indicates they are monitoring 41 water level and flow gauges in the Mississippi Valley Watershed. [Daily stream flow and lake water levels](#) are available, along with historical data by stream or lake.

STREAM GAUGES				
GAUGE LOCATION	DATE	GAUGE DATA	HISTORICAL AVG.	PRECIPITATION
Myers Cave flow	2016-08-16	0.38	1.67	0.00
Buckshot Creek flow	2016-08-16	0.25	0.96	0.00
Ferguson Falls flow	2016-08-16	4.78	13.20	0.00
Appleton flow	2016-08-16	9.48	11.70	0.00

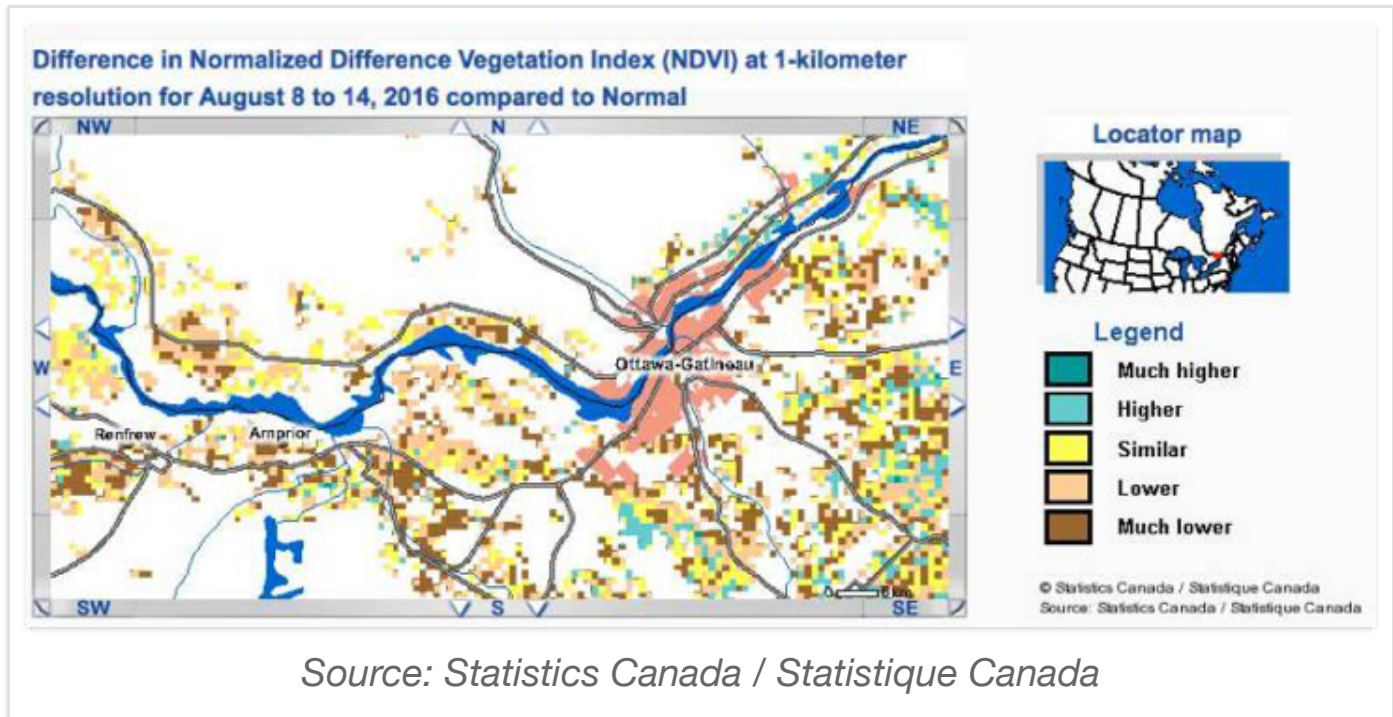
Source: Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority website, <http://mvc.on.ca/water-levels-app/levels-table-option/ataglace.php> , August 16th 2016.

At the provincial level, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry collects provincial water level data at the Surface Water Monitoring Centre in Peterborough. This service is not open and requires individuals to register and justify why they want access to the data.

At the national level, the Government of Canada provides tools for assessing drought conditions. Drought Watch is a service run by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and provides information and tools for the agricultural sector. The [Canadian Drought Monitor](#) is an interactive map providing a visual assessment of drought conditions.



Stats Canada provides a national [Crop Condition Assessment Program](#) that provides interactive maps and data extracts.



The map visualization is quite useful, but the data extracts trail the maps by a couple weeks reducing the timeliness of the data.

The combination of local, provincial and national water data and tools provide farmers with comprehensive yet disconnected perspectives on their situation. A synchronized open data strategy, bridging all levels of government, would provide a powerful resource for the agricultural sector. Help may be on its way, however, as the International Open Data Charter (ODC), the Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition (GODAN), the Open Data Institute (ODI) and the Open Data for Development (OD4D) have teamed up to develop a domain specific open data implementation guide for the agricultural sector. This initiative may not solve the immediate needs of my local farm stand but promises a better data foundation for farmers all around the world.

To learn more about international efforts to bring focus to agricultural open data, GODAN is holding its [2016 Summit](#) in New York City, September 15-16. At this

year's [International Open Data Conference in Madrid](#) on October 6-7, discussions will take place on data standards for key agricultural datasets and categories.

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