

The Daily Courier

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Talk of the Town

Column: Water conservation: choice or necessity?

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Not long ago, the dominant narrative in the Prescott Active Management Area was, "let's build a new pipeline and import water from either the Big Chino aquifer or the Colorado River ... or both."

Why do we need more water? We are "out of safe yield" because we are overdrafting the Little Chino aquifer, which is currently the primary source of water for Prescott, Prescott Valley and Chino Valley. The Arizona Department of Water Resources has asked the affected communities to reach safe yield by 2025.

When the municipalities first met to ponder their options, they concluded that water conservation should be part of the solution, but could not provide enough saved water to meet projected demand.

In fact, they said, the maximum that conservation could produce would be about 20 percent of the total amount of water our area would need to not only achieve safe yield, but to provide water security into the future. Therefore, imported water would be required.

But now that the numbers have been crunched and everyone has looked at the staggering cost of building any pipeline, there is renewed interest in emphasizing the importance of water conservation in an effort to at least add years - perhaps decades - to the calendar before we (might) have to import water.

The Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) believes that a comprehensive, region-wide effort to educate consumers and promote universal acceptance of water conservation is both an excellent idea and a necessity. And if municipalities studied the full potential of region-wide water conservation and developed credible data about the total contribution demand management could make to reducing our water shortage, that would help persuade consumers that conserving water is crucial.

Citizens who already accept the importance of water conservation often share with CWAG their experiences (and results) when they implement changes in how they use water. Longtime CWAG member Lou Bellesi recently reported that when he removed a 10-foot by 20-foot area of Kentucky blue grass, his total water usage dropped from 148,000 gallons annually to 73,000 gallons. Later, Lou reduced rainwater runoff in his yard and dropped his average to 54,000 gallons by building small, rock-lined swales and planting a few native trees near gutter downspouts. Then he installed two hot-water recirculating pumps, low-flow shower heads, and low-flow toilets in both bathrooms. Total annual usage, indoor and outdoor, for Lou and his wife Mary Kay is now at 36,000 gallons per year.

Former CWAG President John Zambrano and his wife Laura have had similar results when it comes to reducing their annual water usage. By installing native low-water-use plants whenever possible, a drip irrigation system equipped with a timer, low-flow toilets and shower heads and a hot-water recirculating system, the Zambranos' annual water usage is about 34,000 gallons. Inside water use is 38 gallons per capita daily (gpcd).

Information about the best way you can conserve water, both indoors and out, is available online. City of

Prescott Water Resource Coordinator Annikki Chamberlain says, "During the summer months water use increases significantly due to outdoor watering; however, practicing a low-water-use lifestyle outdoors is a way everyone can help conserve water. Water Smart landscaping reduces water use, saves money, reduces runoff, and is a fun way to create your own unique yard. Visit prescottwatersmart.com to virtually tour local Water Smart landscapes and gardens, select native and low-water-use plants, share photos and landscape designs, and find local landscape resources. And don't forget to submit a photo of your Water Smart yard to share with others!"

The CWAG website (cwagaz.org) also contains useful conservation information, including a video titled "Water Savvy Landscaping with Native Plants," that will help citizens understand and visualize what can be done when it comes to both saving water outdoors and creating an attractive landscape design.

Anyone who watches the news on TV or reads a newspaper is aware that California is experiencing a severe water shortage. California's governor has mandated sharp statewide reductions in water consumption. We can wait to see if our regional drought, which is in its 15th year, eventually forces our government to suddenly mandate water conservation, or we can accept now the fact that conserving water is not really a choice. It's a necessity.

Please submit your questions and comments to info@cwagaz.org.

CWAG will host a forum/panel discussion on water issues for Prescott mayoral and city council candidates on Saturday, Aug. 1. Details at www.cwagaz.org.

Chris Hoy is president of the Citizens Water Advocacy Group.

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