

Talk of the Town: Regional conservation plan will show us how to save more water

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Gordon Bond Special to the Courier

In the Quad Cities region we are pumping over 4 billion gallons a year more than is being returned to our water supply. Regional cooperation can produce a Regional Conservation Plan that will bring us back to safe yield, where the replenishment of our water supply equals the demands we place on it.

It's eye-opening to see a few of the ways we use all that water:

- Every toilet installed before 1994 can use 8,000 more gallons per year than a high-efficiency toilet.
- A leaky toilet can waste over 5,000 gallons per month.
- Every 20 feet-by-20 feet section of lawn can require 15,000 gallons per year.
- Every round of golf can require 4,000 gallons of water or more.
- Even the most efficient new house loses 14,000 gallons a year or more that cannot be replenished.

Despite our over-pumping, elected officials are still encouraging population growth, and few efforts are taking place to significantly reduce water use. In the interests of our children and grandchildren, this depletion of our water supply must stop.

But how can this be done?

Cooperation among our elected officials is essential. A coordinated effort led by municipal and Yavapai County officials in the Quad Cities region must prepare a Regional Water Conservation Plan that can show the way. A Conservation Plan will:

- Set reasonable objectives for reducing water use in the region for the next 10 and 20 years and longer.
- Identify cost-effective measures, such as incentives for lawn removal and toilet replacement, to greatly expand current water conservation activities.
- Identify the impact on the water supply of thousands of new houses.

- Initiate demonstrations of innovative subdivision designs that are water-neutral, meaning there is no net loss to the aquifer.
- Establish periodic reviews with updates.

Conservation planning works.

In the mid-1990s, Albuquerque citizens woke up to the fact that their water supply was significantly smaller than indicated by previous estimates. In cooperation with Bernalillo County, and with widespread public support, regional plans were prepared. Major investments were made in conservation incentives and other measures. As a result, Albuquerque succeeded in halving water use per person. Albuquerque's water-management program continues to be updated and adapted to improve water-use efficiency.

As citizens of the Prescott region, we too have a responsibility. We can minimize outdoor water use, install efficient toilets, washing machines and other appliances, and remove grass and vegetation that is not drought-tolerant. We must let our officials know that current water policies are unsustainable and unacceptable. As in Albuquerque, our four municipalities, together with Yavapai County, must develop and implement a Regional Water Conservation Plan.

Rick Shean, Water Rights Manager for the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Authority, will discuss the plans Albuquerque's Conservation Plan and provide insights for other communities in the southwest in a free Zoom Webinar presented by the Citizens Water Advocacy Group (CWAG) on May 13. Details under "Next Meeting" at www.cwagaz.org.

Gordon Bond is co-chair of CWAG's education committee and a retired business consultant.

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