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El Paso water

Conservation is good policy all the time

El Paso is in pretty good shape when it comes to having enough water, a far cry from a few years ago when the specter of ever-tightening water restrictions faced the city.

The snow gods in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado blessed the mountains there with plenty of the white stuff that melts into runoff and eventually becomes our drinking water. But just because there was plenty of snow and we're doing OK for water doesn't mean we can waste the precious commodity.

Conservation should never be far from the thoughts of El Pasoans when it comes to water use. After all, we do live in a desert, an area defined by natural scarcity of water. Procedures such as getting water from aquifers, desalination and using recycled water (purple-pipe project) allow even desert areas such as El Paso to maximize the usage of what water is available. And when the snow-melt is good and there's more water available from the river ... well, even better.

But still, conservation is necessary.

El Paso is growing all the time. More and more water hookups are going in all the time. New houses, apartments, businesses, swimming pools, sprinkler systems, swamp coolers -- they all require additional water.

Also, figures show El Pasoans are using more water this year than in past years -- 4.2 billion gallons in June. A good deal of this spike in usage can be attributed to the high temperatures we keep having. And water officials assure us that we won't have any trouble with water shortages this summer. While that's good news, it doesn't obviate the necessity of conservation.

It's a lot better having the luxury to plan for the future before that future and its problems are upon us. Management by crisis is never a good way to deal with situations, and that's where conservation comes in.

Conservation ensures that there will be more water for the future. And it doesn't have to be a painful process. There are many ways to conserve, starting with such items as restricted-flow shower heads and low-water-use toilets. When those fixtures are installed and have been used for a while, it's hard to notice that you're actually using less water.

Common sense must also play a part in conservation. Luxuriant, soft, cool, deep-

green lawns are nice to have, no one's denying that. But they are water guzzlers and anyhow aren't a natural part of the desert ecosystem. Consider xeriscaping. Done correctly, it can be quite attractive. Xeriscaping doesn't mean ripping out sod and dumping in rocks. There's an art to it, and it's water-use friendly.

The time to start conserving and getting into the habit of using water wisely is before more drought years creep up on us and before we're forced to observe more draconian restrictions.

Conservation is planning ahead to ensure an adequate supply of El Paso's lifeblood -- water.

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