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April showers? Not here

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Water use in Victoria is on its way up as water flows in the Guadalupe River, which supplies most of the city's water, are down, making officials anxious about what might happen this summer.

"It's getting dry, and we're getting concerned," said Lynn Short, Victoria's director of utilities.

He added there is plenty of water available now, and there is no looming emergency.

"Nevertheless, water consumption is up," Short said. "We are watching it very closely. As always, we encourage water conservation."

He noted that water use in Victoria spiked at about 17.5 million gallons a day over the weekend. That compares to the city's record use of 19.96 million gallons on July 20, 2000.

But Short said with the entire water system cranked up to maximum capacity, the city can produce 34.5 million gallons in a day.

He said he is expecting water use this week to drop into the range of 12 million to 14 million gallons a day, which doesn't pose any problems.

Under the city's permit from the state, it is currently allowed to take up to 10 percent of the water now flowing down the Guadalupe, or about 34.9 million gallons a day. He said the city is using only half that amount.

Area lakes are also showing stress from the drought. Coletto Creek Reservoir on the Victoria-Goliad county line was down to 94.46 feet this week. The record low is 93.29 feet recorded in August 1996.

"We're not too bad yet," said Chief Ranger Wilfred Korth at the Coletto Creek Reservoir and Park. "We're about 4 feet low."

But he said the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority has begun to pump water from the Guadalupe near Nursery into Coletto to offset the effects of evaporation. Korth said that's the first time the pumps have been used in six years.

Korth said given the current weather trends, he wouldn't be surprised to see the lake reach a record low in July if the drought continues.

He said the low water is not having an adverse effect on campers, boating or fishing. He said the lower water level is producing a nice sandy beach for swimmers and has killed off about one-fourth of the aquatic vegetation that clogs up the nearshore water.

"The other thing we're seeing with the new mud flats is more shorebirds and birds in general than we normally see," Korth said. He said that's because the exposed, wet ground is producing more food for the birds.

The Lake Texana level in Jackson County has dropped to 39.63 feet. Charles Reckaway with the

Lavaca-Navidad River Authority said the record low for the lake is 38.45 feet in February 2000.

He said the lake is down about 4 feet from normal.

"That's not good, but it's not bad," Reckaway said. "These little showers don't provide much inflow, but they help keep it from dropping."

Park Superintendent David Lopez at Lake Texana State Park said the main impact has been on the boat ramp in the park. He said there's about a 6-foot drop between the top of the dock and the water below, making it dangerous for people to get from the dock to their boats.

Lopez said other than that, there have been no other problems for customers. He said the water level drop at Texana has also created a sandy beach along the camping area and has killed about half of the aquatic vegetation.

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