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Drop by drop

Star-Telegram

As the population of the Dallas-Fort Worth area swells, water is becoming ever more precious and expensive.

In the future, Tarrant County residents might get part of their water from a proposed reservoir 150 miles away in Northeast Texas. The estimated cost of constructing the 62,000-acre Marvin Nichols reservoir and a pipeline to ship the water to the Metroplex is a staggering \$2.16 billion.

Adding new supplies isn't the only solution, however, for meeting the long-term water needs of a 16-county North Central Texas region that is expected to more than double in population to 13 million people by 2060. Greatly expanded conservation also must be a major component of any successful strategy.

With that in mind, the Fort Worth City Council should vote at its 7 o'clock meeting tonight to adopt new rules that would reduce the amount of water wasted by unwise watering practices. The regulations would:

Ban outdoor watering from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. from June 1 through Sept. 30 of every year, with the exception of watering by hand or with soaker hoses.

Require new commercial automatic sprinkler systems installed after June 1 of this year to have sensors that would cut off the water flow if it were raining or temperatures dropped to freezing levels.

Mandate that previously existing commercial automatic underground sprinkler systems be retrofitted by June 1, 2007, to include sensors.

Require that residential automatic sprinkler systems installed after June 1, 2007, include sensors.

The proposed ban on outdoor watering during the year's hotter months is a wise conservation measure. Arlington, Dallas and other cities have adopted similar regulations.

The rule would benefit residents by banning watering during hours when water loss from evaporation is higher. That could result in savings on water bills.

The Texas Water Development Board recently approved a regional water plan for the 16-county region. Under the plan, an estimated 28 percent of the region's future water needs would be met by various water reuse and conservation measures ranging from expanded use of low-flow toilets to policies encouraging reduced lawn watering

The proposed Fort Worth rules are an example of the measures that must be adopted if significantly greater water conservation is to be achieved rather than merely talked about.