

Saving For Tomorrow: Austin, help by funding, promoting good ideas

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Way back when, you could drive through West Texas and see irrigation canals filled with water. Conservation wasn't in vogue in the '50s and '60s, so the runoff would just collect along the road.

You don't see that as much today, thanks to the forward-looking work of groundwater districts. In parts of Texas, district managers talk to farmers about the best irrigation practices, a far cry from water standing unused.

This is part of the statewide effort to help ourselves – and future generations – by conserving water. Whether it's cities like Dallas or San Antonio experimenting with the best conservation practices or the ag industry doing its part, water conservation has ramped up.

According to the state's water agency, Texas' 50-year water plan now relies upon conservation to supply 23 percent of future water supplies. That's up from 14 percent five years ago.

But, as with most environmental challenges, we can't stop. Not with a population likely to double by 2050. And certainly not with the threat of droughts the state has recently endured.

This is where legislators can take the lead. Water conservation deserves a central place in the water bills the Legislature needs to pass this session.

Specifically, legislators should:

- Create a statewide campaign to promote water conservation. Like the farmers in West Texas, we can all do our part, whether taking our sprinklers off timers or installing low-flow toilets. A campaign along the lines of Don't Mess with Texas could remind us how we can help.
- Link funding for local water projects to local water conservation plans. If North Texas or another region wants state money for reservoirs or other projects, then its regional water plans must have a conservation strategy. No conservation, no money.
- Also, legislators should fund efforts to promote agriculture practices that conserve water. This is particularly important with droughts on the rise.

These are just three examples. There are others that can help the state meet its future water needs through better conservation. Canals filled with water help no one.

WATER CONSERVATION

Strategies for the three top-user groups:

Municipalities: Reuse water, use tiered water rates, restrict sprinkling.

Agriculture: Practice modern irrigation techniques that don't produce runoff.

Individuals: Install low-flow toilets, turn off water when brushing teeth, use native plants in yard.

