

N. Texas wakes up to water woes

KYLE STEINHAUSER of Frisco says it's past time to change attitudes

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Call this my Al Gore column. In 2004, Mr. Gore gave one of his usual tirades about rising temperatures and the threat of global warming - on the coldest day in New York City in decades.

Now it's my turn. Just after several big storms have moved through the area, I am calling for continued water restrictions and responsibility.

We are not a culture that plans ahead. Scanning the local news reports reveals story after story of selling tomorrow for today. For example, large corporations regularly ship intellectual capital and operations overseas to save a few bucks today, while tomorrow making us dependent on other countries for basic economic needs. Texas already has sold our transportation future to toll conquistadors, and our children's children will pay so we could get a few pennies today.

If Collin County is going to grow and thrive in the future, we cannot afford to take this same attitude regarding water. As easy as it would be to let our children and grandchildren worry about water while we demand green yards, we must make the tough decisions today. Despite recent rains and an effective end to the dry spell, Collin County cities should keep water restrictions in place into perpetuity.

Recent census figures show the metroplex grew 16 percent between 2000 and 2006, adding approximately 842,000 people - the second largest increase in the United States. Among North Texas cities, four of the top 10 in population increase make up Collin County's golden quadrilateral: Allen, Frisco, McKinney and Plano. Seven of the top 10 fastest growing North Texas cities since the last census were in Collin County.

Collin County cities must act now to accommodate the continued future growth. These new residents are not building two-bedroom bungalows or moving to downtown high-rises. They're building large houses with large yards - and most of them want them green. So much so that, as a recent *Dallas Morning News* article said, some are building \$40,000 wells to water their yards. It is past time to change attitudes about water and waste.

I love a nice, lush green yard as much as the next neighbor; but at what cost? North Texans must reconsider ideas about lawns and plants. For example, xeriscaping should become the new rage. It simply means planting flowers and plants that require little additional watering. Similarly, North Texans should move away from high-water, non-native plants and grasses and move toward native varieties instead. Green yards of Bermuda and Saint Augustine are great with unlimited water supplies, but as more people make water more scarce, we must focus on conservation.

While scientific studies often must be taken with a grain of salt, a recent study by Columbia University climatologists predicted a future of perpetual drought. More people with less rainfall is a recipe for disaster. What we once took for granted soon will be a luxury.

This attitude goes for all energy sources. Gas prices will continue to rise as China, India and others demand more energy. While we look for real, sustainable energy alternatives, we must

also conserve. If you do not own livestock or build houses, you probably don't need a pickup. Put your gun rack in that back of your Prius. Until child number three, you really do not need an SUV. Try a high gas-mileage sedan. Already this year the rash of foreclosures is hurting Collin County homeowners. Imagine the situation when gasoline and water cost \$5 per gallon.

I want as little government as possible; however, this is a community issue, and the government determines community outcomes. Not only should residents be forbidden to tap underground water sources for watering their yards, but water restrictions also should continue to enforce conservation. We live in one of the richest counties in one of the richest nations on earth. While millions around the world suffer without sufficient food or potable water, surely our lawns can survive with getting drenched once a week.

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