



Lubbock's conservation efforts don't wash, groups say

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Lubbock water rates offer its biggest consumers some of the weakest penalties in the state, two conservation groups said Monday.

The National Wildlife Federation and the state chapter of the Sierra Club found Lubbock's water pricing had the weakest incentive for conservation out of 19 cities studied across the state.

Steep, monthly base costs, which the city charges to cover the cost of existing and new water infrastructure construction, meant that the city's most frugal customers pay more per 1,000 gallons of water than heavy customers.

Lubbock moved to more regressive pricing almost a year ago after forecasts showed that rates discouraging high-use customers could fail to cover the city's cost of delivering water.

Base monthly water charges shot up to cover the miles of new and existing pipelines and pumps needed to deliver water.

Such prices sent the wrong message to water customers who do the best job of managing their monthly use, said Ken Kramer, state director of the Sierra Club.

Cities like San Antonio have found better solutions to the problem of discouraging water sales while still covering costs, he said.

"I think you have examples out there of cities who have found that it is possible to do both," Kramer said. "It is an issue that any retail water supplier has to take into account."

The study noted city limitations on when customers may water their lawns during the day.

But it also noted the regressive pricing and the lack of any city funding to replace high-use home appliances like toilets.

"You don't have to have a big conservation department to get some good reductions in water use if you have an effective pricing structure that really rewards people for efficiently using their water and punishes people who are extravagant in their use of water," Kramer said.

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