

Joanna Wolaver, Jennifer Walker: Water conservation — outdoors and indoors — is key

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Adopting a twice-a-week watering schedule is a wise move for North Texas municipalities that will save money, stretch existing water supplies, prepare for the next drought and raise awareness about efficient water use. We applaud the Dallas City Council for adopting this strategy and the mayors of Fort Worth, Arlington, Dallas and Irving for pushing this regional water-conservation plan. We encourage all other regional water suppliers to move forward expeditiously with this approach.

The recent drought reminded us of the critical importance of protecting our water supply — Texas' most precious and limited natural resource. It is essential that we use it in the most efficient manner possible at all times, not just during droughts.

Outdoor water use, which mostly means lawn watering, represents one of the largest uses of water in urban areas. Summer use often is 50 to 60 percent higher, and in some cases, 100 percent higher than in the winter when lawn watering is minimal. About half of the water poured on lawns runs off or evaporates without benefiting landscaping. We can do better than that.

Establishing a year-round schedule of days for outdoor watering will help reduce that waste, especially if accompanied by restrictions on using sprinklers during the hottest time of the day. Evaporation already takes too much water out of lakes. There's no need to lose more by spraying water into the air when temperatures are at their peak.

Though critically important, limiting lawn watering to twice a week on a regional basis and avoiding midday irrigation are just steps on a longer journey. We urge North Texas water suppliers to adopt a suite of water-conservation strategies to reduce indoor and outdoor use.

One essential strategy is to adopt more equitable water-rate structures. In many cities, a fairly small number of homeowners are responsible for a large percentage of peak usage on hot summer days.

Charging low rates for frugal water users and much higher rates for the heaviest users is one effective way to encourage conservation. Such a residential rate structure would provide financial incentives for being more efficient and ensure that large users pay their fair share.

Twice-a-week watering schedules, time-of-day restrictions, and fair rate structures are relatively inexpensive strategies for water providers. When implemented correctly, they save money for all but the biggest water users while helping to change the way people think about and use water all the time, making the region better prepared for the next drought. Our 2010 report, "Sprayed Away," provides more information about reducing outdoor water use ([texaswatermatters.org/outdoorwater .htm](http://texaswatermatters.org/outdoorwater.htm)).

We all need to make water conservation a priority and part of our daily routines. Water suppliers can help make that happen, but individual water users also have to help out.

Water is a limited resource — critical for cities, industries, farms and ranches, seafood production, and our natural heritage. We must manage water wisely in order to sustain that resource. Adopting twice-weekly watering restrictions as part of a comprehensive water-conservation program will advance that goal.

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