

Milan Michalec, guest columnist

[New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung](#) Opinion Piece

September 20, 2012

Drought Plans Show the Need to Tighten, Not Loosen Water Use in San Antonio

On the 14th, Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) announced it had implemented Stage 4 of its Drought Management Plan. Landscape watering may be done every two weeks, but only with a hand-held hose, bucket or soaker hose. Lawn/turf irrigation is now prohibited.

This action affects the Fort Sam Houston as well as Lackland and Randolph Air Force bases.

Two weeks before, JBSA announced it had implemented Stage 3; lawn/turf watering with sprinklers was then allowed only once every other week.

At about the same time the San Antonio Express-News reported that San Antonio Water System (SAWS) was considering a loosening of outdoor water restrictions.

The water restrictions being imposed throughout JBSA are not the same as those of SAWS; the former are more stringent. This was the result of a Biological Opinion Agreement, a 2008 agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), when the Department of Defense complied with the Endangered Species Act.

When the SAWS proposal was published, it was also reported that the cities of Marion, Kirby, Garden Ridge and the Green Valley Special Utility District had all adopted Stage 3 restrictions. The same restrictions had already been implemented by New Braunfels and San Marcos, the host city of Texas State University and home of the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment.

The rationale used to support the loosening of future restrictions for SAWS customers included better than expected performance of the SAWS Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) system in south Bexar County and the addition of water supplies from non-Edwards sources. In addition to the fortunate timing of significant rains in July and August, both of these sources had been cited as reasons why Stage 3 restrictions were avoided this year.

By investing in resources such as the ASR or by employing aggressive conservation measures aimed at reducing water use both indoors and out, to include the expanded use of recycled water, SAWS has earned an enviable reputation as a leader in water conservation world-wide.

Though the ASR has proven to be a reliable method of storing water from the Edwards Aquifer for SAWS customers, it is also integral to the plans of the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA). It is the

presumed alternate source of water to meet the required Federal objectives of the Edwards Aquifer Authority Habitat Conservation Plan (EAAHCP) after all planned options have been exhausted.

Negotiated in late 2011, partners in this plan include the EAA, San Marcos, New Braunfels, Texas State University and SAWS. This plan has been submitted to the federal authorities and might be approved by the end of 2012.

Non-Edwards sources, such as the Trinity Aquifer and Canyon Reservoir are increasingly being exposed to the demands of the rapidly growing regional population surrounding San Antonio such as in Comal, Kendall and Hays counties. These areas of the Hill Country are subjected to repeated cycles of drought, with few, if any, alternative sources of water.

Using water from sources like these for outdoor use to avoid water restrictions in San Antonio is done at the expense of others. Ultimately, it strains the availability of drinking water of others.

Just as it applies to all other water suppliers, the restricted use of water during drought is not water conservation. It is a temporary response to a temporary condition—drought.

During these times, outdoor water use is typically reduced to preserve drinking water for indoor use. The Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) estimates that 40 percent of all municipal water use is outdoors and half of that is lost to runoff from the excessive watering of lawns.

The time has come for San Antonio—its residents, industries, and leaders, to embrace the reality of the overall water situation everyone must accept today. Water is finite and drought reduces it.

Should this fact be ignored, there's one that cannot be—the agreements and obligations of Federal law—the EAAHCP, that are to be honored in the future when inevitable drought will ultimately produce the unimaginable.

Imagine how much easier it will be to meet these requirements by visualizing and implementing the landscape of the future—one that does not require weekly watering, or less, rather than perpetuate the one we see today—one that uses, and is known to waste, so much of a dwindling resource.

Clearly, now is the time to tighten, not loosen outdoor water use restrictions in San Antonio.

Michalec is a resident of Kendall County and serves on the Cow Creek Groundwater Conservation District.

http://herald-zeitung.com/opinion/guest_columns/article_e611b708-02cb-11e2-8bfe-0019bb2963f4.html

FAIR USE NOTICE This document contains copyrighted material whose use has not been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. The Texas Living Waters Project, which is a nonprofit undertaking, is making this article available in our efforts to promote comprehensive water planning in Texas. We believe that this constitutes a "fair use" of the copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. If you wish to use this copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond "fair use", you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.