

Conservation benefits utilities, customers in long run

By GREG TRAINOR

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The Drought Response Information Project campaign is in full swing this summer, informing water-users how to save water inside and outside their homes.

But, you say, "I heard the water situation is better this year. What about all those floods? Why should I conserve water?"

In non-emergency situations, water conservation can be developed as a long-term operating philosophy for the community. That's part of what the DRIP campaign is trying to illustrate. Water conservation is typically associated with an emergency need to reduce consumption to meet limited water supplies. Low winter snowpack and unfilled reservoirs typically leads to reduced supply, creating the emergency situation.

In this situation, utilities must reduce water consumption immediately. Mandatory watering schedules and rate hikes usually do the trick. But there are some consequences that come from reducing demand so quickly.

Conservation results in dramatically reduced revenues – and put a squeeze on the utility's budget. You may have heard about water utilities in the Denver area raising water rates to recoup revenue lost from reduced water sales, because residents were so good at conservation.

Sudden reduction in water consumption is also hard on customers because their normal watering habits are disrupted, well-cared-for lawns die, flower gardens wither and uncertainty prevails.

On the other hand, long-term water-saving habits pay off in the long run for the consumer and the community.

Water conservation also reduces the demand for water and slows down the timeline for expansion of water-treatment facilities. Ultimately customers absorb the costs of large expansions when demand exceeds capacity. The less water is consumed, the longer utilities can continue operating with what they have, and the longer costly construction can be avoided.

In short, it's far more economical to conserve a supply of water already being stored in a reservoir than it is to go out and purchase, store, transport, treat and distribute a new supply of water. It's also easier to make every drop count now than it is to suddenly stop watering because of an emergency shortage. For those reasons, it is to your benefit to conserve water coming out of your tap, because it is coming from the utility's existing supply.

*We live in a semiarid climate where droughts will always be a part of our environment. Water for our future means conserving now. The Drought Response Information Project (DRIP) is a collaboration between the valley's domestic water utilities and CSU Cooperative Extension to provide information and educate the public about drought and the importance of water conservation.*