

## Conserve Now or Pay Later: Why We Need to Care About Our Water Use

Water conservation in a region that is defined by flat land with few rivers or lakes, and a groundwater supply that is limited, coupled with a booming agricultural community presents the city of Lubbock with unique water opportunities and challenges. Continued variability in weather patterns coupled with rapid development and growth has led to new questions concerning how to address water waste. Water supplies are becoming more expensive to develop, and as a community, we need to rethink how we use water and what we can do to stop wasting it.

Lubbock's residential market is the largest water user group in the city and the one where concerted conservation can make the most impact. When we think of water conservation, we often think about taking shorter showers or doing less laundry each week. Indoor water conservation is helpful in lowering our water bills, but only has a minor effect on the overall conservation issue. Outdoor activities, however, such as watering our lawns, filling our pools, or hosing down our patios is where conservation can have the greatest impact.

The City of Lubbock has acknowledged the need to conserve and manage its water supplies by developing a 100-year water plan. Since water conserved is the cheapest water we can ever find, Lubbock continues to emphasize and educate the public on how to conserve water and to detect water waste within the home. However, these steps are just a beginning. The City has strategically implemented programs that create the most cost-effective conservation such as an inclined water rate structure, irrigation restrictions, and reducing system water loss. However, the City has not initiated higher capital cost programs, such as providing water conservation rebates to homeowners or businesses or replacing portions of City park landscaping with xeriscaping to reduce water usage. Parks often use well water for irrigation, making the cost to irrigate cheap, but adding to groundwater depletion.

Drought cycles and changing climate conditions will continue similar to what we have experienced for more than a century on the South Plains. The question for Lubbock is no longer how to survive until the drought ends but how to optimize our water resources and extend their useful life. The focus now has to be on sensible water management. If the City of Lubbock increases its leadership role in water conservation, it will enhance the success it has enjoyed in keeping its water usage lower than most cities in the region. But make no mistake, the City can only do so much. Water conservation must also be a community effort. If we continue to use water at the rate we are now, it will only become more precious and expensive. We can either conserve now or pay later.