

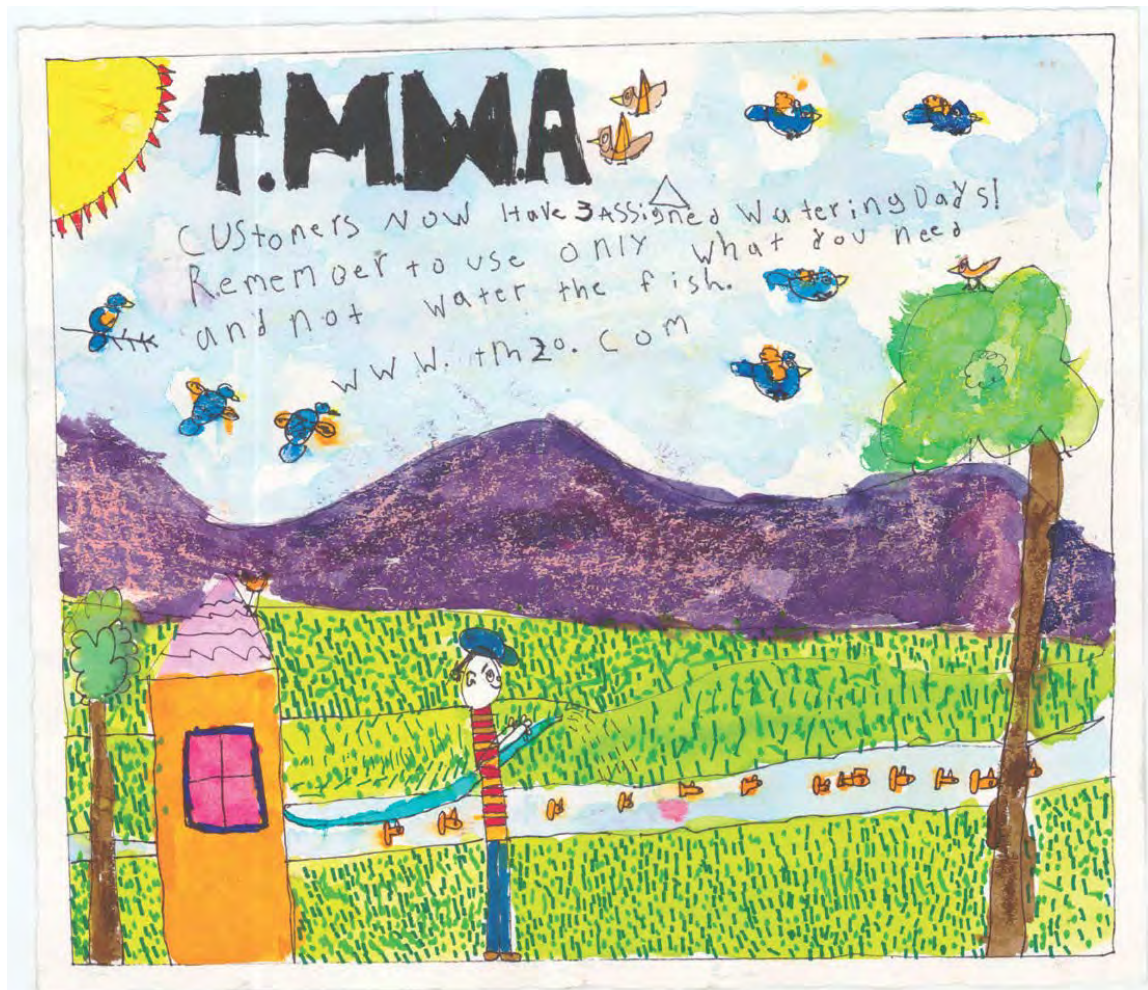


## TMWA Board Meeting

Wednesday, July 15, 2015

### Press Clippings

June 14, 2015 – July 7, 2015



*Joshua & Sarah Burrows (Jessie Beck Elementary School)  
2010 Poster Art Contest - Second Place, Grades K-3*

June 15, 2015

Truckee Meadows Water Authority

PO Box 70002

Prescott, AZ 86304-7002

Attn: Customer Service

To Whom It May Concern:

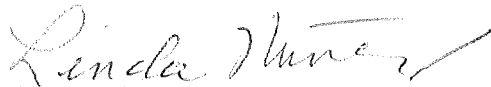
Enclosed is a copy of the receipt for repairs to my irrigation system. This will be my third summer in a new Lennar Home, and it is the second time I have had to pay for costly repairs and large water bills due to faulty construction, design and materials. Essentially, the valves were not buried deep enough. (They even used the very thin PVC!)

I am writing to request that you make an adjustment to my account for large bill I paid last month for \$158.20. I shut off the supply to the irrigation immediately when I saw water flowing rapidly out of the valve box and through the drain. It was not a subtle leak and I believe I caught it right away as the gutters were not flooded. I am unaware of any other problems and my current bill reflects the fact that the system has been off while I waited for someone to repair it. The rain was truly a lawn-saver this past month.

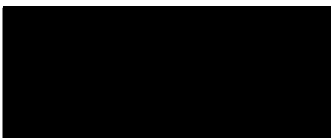
This large bill was not due to waste or neglect on my part. I blame Lennar for bidding low and letting unsuspecting customers take the loss when the irrigation fails. Perhaps, the board of TMWA can address the issue with Lennar and other builders if it is (as I've been told) a common problem.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,



Linda Nunez



# Invoice # 1342



Steven Taitel/Owner  
P.O. Box 451  
Sparks, NV 89432  
Phone: 775-997-8923  
License # 072001

Invoice Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone #: 331-4140  
Acct. #: \_\_\_\_\_

Call

To: Linda Marez  
2931 Garden Ct  
Sparks NV 89439

TYPE OF WORK	FREQUENCY	DESCRIPTION	UNIT	AMOUNT
11-Place				
2 Crosstop Drains			P.	707.00
1 main irrigation valve			L.	50.00
1 add isolation valve				12.00
1 report re-located irrigation box				
2 7" main line valves				
Parts				
2 1" crossstop valves			1 large hole	20.00
3 2" x 1" nipples			2 1" T	EQUIPMENT
2 3" x 1" nipple				SUB-TOTAL
1 1" pb valve				TAX
1 1" RIS Drip				TOTAL
DATE: _____ SIGNATURE: <u>For POK 5/30</u>				1200.00

**From:** Alan Gross [REDACTED]  
**Date:** June 25, 2015 at 9:37:16 PM PDT  
**To:** Marlene Olsen <[marlene@goodstandingoutreach.com](mailto:marlene@goodstandingoutreach.com)>  
**Subject: Re: Tell the Board Submission**  
**Reply-To:** Alan Gross [REDACTED]

Thank you for your reply to my problem and addressing my water use worries. The Truckee Meadows has been wasting far too much water, not only does this endanger the livelihood of the people living here, but it also endangers one of the least known natural wonders of Northern Nevada, Pyramid Lake.

I was active on the board of our HOA for a number of years and one of the things we did was to reduce the lawn areas within our common area. The reduction of approximately 1/2 of our lawns reduced our water usage by 30% saving millions of gallons of water in our watering season. I look at all of the lawns, needlessly mandated by our local governments, and wonder how much water can be saved by getting rid of lawns along boulevards and around commercial properties?

I appreciate the invite to your Board Meeting, but I am a working man that has little time to participate in local government issues. Maybe some day when I retire I will be able to devote time and actively work towards making a difference in my community. In the mean time I beseech of you and the other Board Members to urge and promote water saving awareness by our community leaders. While they (our community leaders) may change their requirements, will that help save water right now? They need to figure out ways to encourage businesses to reduce their landscaping either by tax incentives or increased water rates. If we are truly experiencing global warming this drought, we are currently in, could be a game changer for the Truckee Meadows. When you consider the fact that Winnemucca Lake was still alive and Pyramid Lake was 85 feet higher, less than 100 years ago, the future of Pyramid Lake and the Truckee River doesn't look all that bright.

Alan Gross

On Monday, June 22, 2015 11:15 AM, Marlene Olsen <[marlene@goodstandingoutreach.com](mailto:marlene@goodstandingoutreach.com)> wrote:

Good morning:

I will be forwarding this email to Customer Service. Someone will contact you about getting your account information correct and help you establish an online account. I am sorry for the trouble.

To comment on your second point: TMWA is concerned as you are about the required landscaping in developments and commercial properties. We are working with the planning departments

In hopes of changing what the cities and county require in their codes. Your comments will be included for the Board of Directors to see in their next agenda packet. The next Board of Directors

Meeting is Wednesday, July 15th at 10 a.m. You are always welcome to provide your comments during the public comment period, which is always one of the first items on the agenda. The TMWA

Board meets at Sparks City Council Chambers at 745 4th St. in Sparks

Thanks for taking the time to reach out to us.

Marlene Olsen  
GoodStanding Outreach  
775-829-2810  
775-772-0020-cell

-----Original Message-----

From: Tell the Board [mailto: [REDACTED]]  
Sent: Sunday, June 21, 2015 4:08 PM  
To: Marlene Olsen; R Charpentier; K Mazeres  
Subject: Tell the Board Submission

Name: Alan Gross  
Email: [REDACTED]

Comments: First off the first name on my account has been misspelled. Secondly the information sent in the Letter of Jan. 2, 2015 to set up an online account has the account number incorrect. I waited for a few month then tried to set it up but it tells me that the account information is different than what I have entered. Really? How am I supposed to be able to set up an online account if all the information you have about me is incorrect? You seem to be able to send me the water bill OK.

Next, at what point in time does TMWA decide we are living in a desert and decide to act like it? Billions of gallons of water are being wasted every week due to boulevard lawns and lawns required by our local governments in and around commercial businesses.

That is all, thanks for listening.

Hi Maria:

Growth and development in regard to water resources in the Truckee Meadows is a very complicated issue. First of all, your concern will be forwarded to the Board of Directors and will be in their next agenda packet for their July 15th meeting. Should you ever want to address them in person, the Board meets on the third Wednesday of the month at 10 a.m. at the Sparks Council Chambers, 745 B St., Sparks. Public comment is one of the first items on the agenda. But, please confirm the meeting time and date, as sometimes meetings need to be adjusted:

[www.tmwa.com/about\\_us/meeting\\_center?news\\_id=3](http://www.tmwa.com/about_us/meeting_center?news_id=3)

Let me start by explaining that TMWA is a water purveyor that does not set policy on growth, new building and development. TMWA's scope of operation is limited to providing water service to those who have secured sufficient water rights and have been given approval to build. Policies regarding growth in our community are established by elected officials at the city council, county commission and regional planning level.

Please be assured that the water you are saving now does make a difference. Some people mistakenly believe that when our customers use less water through conservation, the water saved is used for growth. That is not what happens. Unused water right now is retained in our drought reserves. TMWA cannot resell conserved water to serve new houses or businesses. Your home has dedicated water rights that cannot be taken if you conserve.

As for how new hook-ups happen: There is a finite amount of water rights available in the Truckee Meadows. No growth can occur beyond that limit. Your home has a service commitment from TMWA (backed by water rights). The water rights used for the service commitment to your home are the same as what occurs today when new projects are built - water rights have to be dedicated for a service commitment. These are not new water rights - these are water rights on the Truckee River that were assigned through a federal decree in the 1940's and are changed from agricultural/irrigation use to municipal use. If you conserve, your service commitment from the utility does not diminish and cannot be taken away to support growth. Again, new development must secure water rights before being approved; these must be acquired from someone willing to stop using their water and sell the rights.

Here's a link to our topic paper on growth for detailed information:

[http://tmwa.com/docs/your\\_water/topics/topics\\_growth\\_20150101.pdf](http://tmwa.com/docs/your_water/topics/topics_growth_20150101.pdf)

Please continue to help out the community and save because every gallon you save now is being held back in our upstream drought reservoirs to use later or next year, should we need it.

Thanks for your concern.

Marlene Olsen  
GoodStanding Outreach  
775-829-2810

Begin forwarded message:

From: Tell the Board [REDACTED]

Date: June 27, 2015 at 7:10:39 AM PDT

To: M Olsen <[molsen@o-apr.com](mailto:molsen@o-apr.com)<<mailto:molsen@o-apr.com>>>, R Charpentier  
<[rcharpentier@tmwa.com](mailto:rcharpentier@tmwa.com)<<mailto:rcharpentier@tmwa.com>>>, "K Mazerres"  
<[kmazerres@tmwa.com](mailto:kmazerres@tmwa.com)<<mailto:kmazerres@tmwa.com>>>

Subject: Tell the Board Submission

Name: maria mercado

Email: 

Comments: My family and I believe in conserving water. But also believe the TMWA board are hypocrites . In south reno alone you are providing hundreds of new hook-ups. My conservation only leads to TMWA having new customers

## Coming Sunday: The RGJ investigates local water use



A time lapse look at the drought and our dwindling water supply as we head into the summer season Jason Bean & Jeff DeLong

[Brian Duggan](#) and [Jeff DeLong](#), RGJ 8:01 a.m. PDT June 18, 2015  
CONNECT [4](#) [TWEET](#) [LINKEDIN](#) COMMENT EMAIL MORE

On Sunday, the Reno Gazette-Journal will publish the first part of a four part-investigation into water use in the Truckee Meadows.

We'll begin with residential water use this month and then explore commercial water use, agriculture in Northern Nevada and finally how western communities are trying to adapt to this unprecedented drought.

The investigation started a year ago when the RGJ requested water user data from the Truckee Meadows Water Authority. While the water utility initially denied access to the information, the RGJ successfully used Nevada's public records laws to open the information for public scrutiny.

Since then, the RGJ analyzed water usage for TMWA customers, including the top 1,000 metered and top 1,000 flat-rate residential customers and overall water consumption for the 83,695 residential customers of TMWA.

The RGJ found that all residential customers combined used more water in 2014 than in 2011 — the last year there was a healthy snowpack. Reporting includes a map of where the top water users live and how much they consumed in 2014.

[We're also introducing the the RGJ Water Savers Club](#) — a free group intended to provide news and tips about water, a simple online form to track your water usage and chances to win gift cards from Moana Nursery. Through the club, we're aiming to save 5 million gallons of water. The club will also partner with the Girl Scouts of Sierra Nevada to provide conservation and water information to children in our region.

**Don't want to miss the series? Be sure to become an RGJ subscriber today**

[RGJ](#)

[Reno Gazette Journal | rgj.com](http://rgj.com)

Meanwhile, the drought will continue to strain the local water system -- and how we live in the Truckee Meadows.

Lake Tahoe, the region's most important reservoir, has been at or below its natural rim for eight months, cutting off flow into the Truckee River. All the river's other reservoirs are way down as well. And, the river is flowing at levels not seen last year until the middle of summer.

To meet demand, backup water supplies will soon be needed and Reno-area residents and businesses are already being asked to cut water use.

In this drought-vulnerable place about to grow significantly, some critics suggest not enough is being done to conserve limited water supplies and say the current drought is making the problem all too clear.

"This drought, quite frankly, has exceeded anything we've ever known before. We're really in uncharted territory," said Susan Lynn, a Reno conservationist and water expert.

# The drought is relentless; here's what it's affecting

How is the drought affecting your life?

Nevada is in the grip of a drought now four years in duration. Impacts are mounting. What are they?

## Low water

After the big winter of 2011 had the region's lakes and reservoirs brimming, four years of drought have steadily dropped water levels. Lake Tahoe dipped below its natural rim in October, cutting off flow into the Truckee River. Tahoe is not expected to spill into the river at all this year.

- Faces of drought

## A trickling river

The Truckee River dropped well below legally mandated flows in the summer and is there again now. With the river's diminished flows unable to provide sufficient water to meet summer demand, the Truckee Meadows Water Authority was forced to tap reserve supplies stored in upstream reservoirs for the first time in 20 years in 2014. It will do so again this summer.

- Faces of drought

## Withering fields

One of the drought's biggest hits is being felt by Nevada's important agricultural industry. Many ranchers have been forced to sell off cattle. Alfalfa crops normally cut several times per year were reduced to one. Irrigation water is scarce and in some places like Lovelock, non-existent.

- Faces of drought

## Dangerous wildfires

Drought-parched forests are ready to burn. Thus far, the Reno-Tahoe area has been fortunate and escaped any major, damaging fires during the drought but the potential was demonstrated last summer by the massive King Fire west of Lake Tahoe and by the Rim

Fire at Yosemite the year before. This summer, experts are concerned major fires could start simultaneously across the drought-stricken West and strain available firefighting resources.

- Faces of drought

#### Troubled wildlife

Lack of water and natural food is impacting animals ranging from squirrels and fish to wild horses, with many wandering into human neighborhoods as a result. The situation is expected to create a busy summer for bear problems as black bears raid garbage and break into homes in search of a meal.

- Faces of drought

#### Recreation impacts

The Reno-Tahoe area's vital recreation industry is hard hit by drought. Boat launches are high and dry. Marinas at Lake Tahoe must dredge to stay in operation. It was a rough winter for ski resorts, many of which were forced to close early due to barren ski slopes.

- 

RGJ research  
Jeff DeLong



[Jeff DeLong](#), RGJ 9:25 a.m. PDT June 18, 2015



Images from the drought stricken Washoe Lake in June 2015. (Photo: Andy Barron/RGJ)

CONNECT [6 TWEETLINKEDIN](#)COMMENTEMAILMORE

As the four-year drought refuses to release its deadly hold on the West, its effects are mounting.

They include dropping lakes, reservoirs and rivers, stressed wildlife, wilting agricultural fields, challenges to an important recreation industry and risk of catastrophic wildfires.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

[Coming Sunday: The RGJ investigates local water use](#)

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Editor's note: RGJ series examines water use in time of drought

Kelly Ann Scott 37 minutes ago



*RGJ*

Kelly Ann Scott, executive editor of the Reno Gazette-Journal.

This reporting on our region's water use is the first in a four-part series examining the drought's effects on our way of life in the Truckee Meadows.

We will bring you more in the months ahead — an examination of commercial water use in July, a look at the relationship between water and agriculture in August, and we will finish in September with a deep dive into the question of what is the future of our water system.

To do this reporting, we requested public data a year ago from the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, including the top 1,000 users in many different categories. While the water authority initially denied the request, the RGJ used Nevada's Open Records Law to obtain this data.

Our reporting isn't intended to shame the top users; it's intended to give our community the facts we need about our water use so that a meaningful conversation about our future can ensue. That's why we've included a digital map of the top users in our area without naming them.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

[RGJ Investigates: We're using more water today than in 2011](#)

The reporting reveals a fact about our community's water use that surprised me: Despite the increased awareness of the drought, as a community we used more water in 2014 than we did in 2011, the last year we had a healthy snowpack.

Even water use here at RGJ Media mirrors that trend. While we will report on our own use in our examination of commercial water consumption, we need to acknowledge now that we, too, used more water in 2014 than we did in 2011.

In 2011, the RGJ used 4.1 million gallons, making us the 134th highest commercial user in TMWA, according to our analysis. And, in 2014, we used 4.9 million gallons and ranked No. 124 in commercial use, the analysis found.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

[Saving water during drought: Do we do enough?](#)



## LogiNEWSA top water user, TMWA board member says she's cutting back

Jeff DeLong, RGJ47 minutes ago

*RGJ file*

Spring rains and customer response to requests to use less water resulted in a 19 percent savings in May.



*RGJ file*

Naomi Duerr.

Naomi Duerr is on the list of top water users for 2014, but the Reno city councilwoman describes her efforts to save water as a success. Duerr, who serves on the board of the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, used about 616,000 gallons of water at her Greenfield Drive home last year, according to records obtained by the Reno Gazette-Journal from the authority.

That was enough to place Duerr in the top half of the top 1,000 metered water customers. But she said her high water use in 2014 was an anomaly — largely the result of undetected irrigation leaks — that stands out among a string of years of steadily decreasing use.

"Things can happen. You're making really good progress and then you have a setback," Duerr said. "Every so often you have an outlier year."

Neoma Jardon, another Reno councilwoman who serves on the water authority board, made the top water user list with a 2014 consumption of 646,000 gallons. But that was far below the 885,000 gallons used in 2013. After learning last year that she was among the top water users, Jardon got a water audit that revealed a leaky toilet was wasting massive amounts of water. Jardon urged other residents to also take advantage of TMWA's free water audit program, which she said can easily reveal problems of which they otherwise wouldn't be aware.

Duerr and her husband purchased the 2-acre southwest Reno lot, studded with fruit trees, in 2009. The previous owner, Duerr said, was a flat-rate water customer who used nearly 1.1 million gallons that year. The Duerrs immediately switched to metered service and moved to cut water use, she said. They installed drip irrigation for their orchard and removed substantial amounts of grass. The result, Duerr said, was a 43 percent drop in water use by 2010, to 569,000 gallons.

Further changes cut another 40 percent over the next three years, with 349,000 gallons used in 2013, she said. The Duerrs managed to save despite adding to the flowerbeds, grape vines and fruit trees on their property, she said.

Use increased to 616,000 gallons in 2014, a change Duerr largely attributes to underground irrigation leaks she thinks were caused by a hard winter freeze. Flow from an irrigation ditch that feeds a pond Duerr uses for irrigation was also cut off in August due to drought conditions, leading to more use of utility water.

Water use so far this year appears down again, Duerr said. Consumption in May was about 3,000 gallons, the least for that month ever, water authority officials confirmed.

"We are back on track now," she said.

Duerr describes her property as a prime example of how some relatively simple changes can dramatically cut consumption.

"I'm extremely proud of what we've done here," Duerr said. "It's a learning experience. We've gotten back to great results again, and I'm still not satisfied."

Governor Brian Sandoval speaks before signing an executive order to create a Nevada drought forum during a press conference at Washoe State Park on Wednesday April 8, 2015.

**Meanwhile, Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval**, whose southwest Reno home regularly ranked among top water users, continues to make efforts to reduce water consumption, according to an aide. "The governor has taken multiple proactive measures to address the water use at his personal residence," said Sandoval's spokeswoman, Mari St. Martin.

Those steps include switching over to metered water service last March and the installation of low-flow toilets, St. Martin said. Sandoval also had a water audit of the Latigo Drive home conducted by the Truckee Meadows Water Authority and is currently receiving bids from local companies to xeriscape his yard, she said.



*Andy Barron/RGJ*

In April, the Reno Gazette-Journal reported Sandoval's Reno home was among the top 1,000 water users served by the water authority between 2011 and 2014. The highest water use for the nearly 1-acre grassy lot that includes a swimming pool was in 2012 at just over 1 million gallons. The least was in 2014 at 876,000 gallons. High water use was largely the result of overwatering due to an irrigation clock that had been improperly timed, a landscape contractor who is taking care of the property while Sandoval resides at the governor's mansion in Carson City said.

In April, Sandoval said conserving water is a personal priority as Nevada suffers through extended drought.

"I think it's the right thing to do. I want to try to set an example," Sandoval said.

## Is the Reno Gazette-Journal One of the Region's Top Water Users? — Fact-Check Friday

June 19, 2015 By [Bob Conrad](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



Google satellite image of the Reno Gazette-Journal facility.

RGJ's water consumption jumped by 695,000 gallons from 2013 to 2014.

The media company only recently started water conservation efforts.

Water consumption among water users is a very complex topic, one that ThisisReno [covered extensively last year](#).

The *Reno Gazette-Journal* (RGJ) continues coverage of water use during the drought as well, and TMWA recently published in a bill statement that RGJ had again requested this year's data on the top water users in the region.

Two separate sources have told us that RGJ ranks high on the list of industrial waters users in the Truckee Meadows. It turns out the topic was [discussed during a public meeting last year](#).

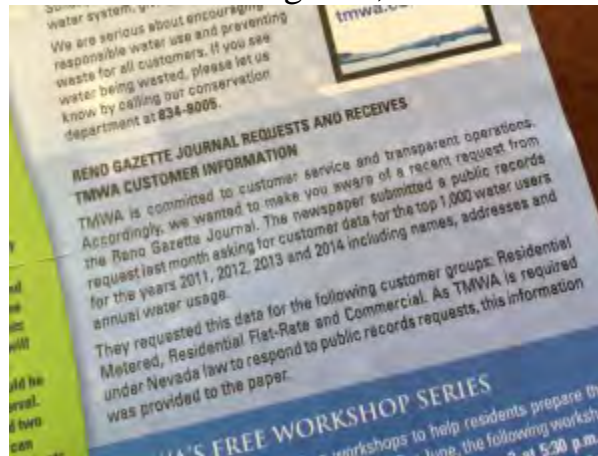
How the RGJ uses its water is of interest for the reason that they have covered public officials who have used large amounts of water – the Governor, in particular. In addition, the RGJ just this week launched an [“RGJ Water Savers Club”](#) to help encourage water conservation in the region.

Weighing the Benefits of Water Usage

Before looking at RGJ's water use, it's important to explain why high-water use rankings may be less meaningful than we'd like. There is always going to be a

top water user, and there's always going to be greater degrees of consumption, conservation and waste among all levels of users.

In ranking water consumers, what we're dealing with is ordinal data, which has its limitations: Ordinal data only tell us who's first, last and in the middle to varying degrees on a rank-ordered list: 1., 2., 3., 4., 5. and so on. These data don't tell us any characteristics of being first, last or in the middle.



RGJ's records request as detailed in TMWA's water bill. This is Reno replicated the request to see how RGJ ranked among water users.

So a top water user may be a municipal entity responsible for extensive water delivery in order to service large populations and properties, such as a city, county or school district. The entity's respective level of waste, or water efficiency, is variable and relative.

A deeper analysis of why individual entities or businesses rank the way they do is arguably more informative.

Consider a city park. Open to anyone, parks are likely large consumers of water. It can be argued a large expanse of green grass has community benefits.

Conversely, a private property with a large expanse of green grass is of less value to anyone other than the property owners, other than the potential benefits of a nice view, property values and perhaps some other environmental benefits, such as keeping weeds to a minimum.

Another simplistic, hypothetical example: Let's say a large water user, a park, is consuming 100,000 acre-feet per year. Let's also say a subdivision is consuming 30,000 acre-feet per year. Both follow the Truckee Meadows Water Authority request to save 10 percent of their water consumption.

When it comes to conservation, the park's 10,000 acre-feet per year is clearly greater than the 3,000 acre-feet per year the subdivision is saving.

Mike Carrigan, sitting as a TMWA Board member last year, [said](#), "Some of our largest water users are some of the most efficient users in the valley."

How the water is being used is another consideration.

Open spaces have both tangible and non-market values. We enjoy directly and indirectly the benefits of open spaces, such as parks, so it can be argued that large water users, such as the City of Reno and Washoe County, are providing a benefit to most Truckee Meadows residents when they keep their grass green and when they conserve water.

The RGJ, however, is on private property.

RGJ's Water Usage By the Numbers

Once notified in TMWA water bills that RGJ had requested records of high volume water users (they did the same last year, to the consternation of many residents concerned about their privacy) last month, ThisisReno duplicated the request to see where the Gannett-owned company stood in the rankings.

"I thought we might be in the top 100 because we do have a very large lawn," said RGJ's Watchdog Content Coach Brian Duggan at a June 2014 TMWA Board meeting. "I'm not surprised we are in the top 120, and that will be disclosed (in RGJ reporting), obviously. We will be very open where we stand on that list as well."

No reporting disclosure, since June of 2014, about where RGJ stands in the ranking of top water users, has been made to date.



Kelly Ann Scott, RGJ executive editor.

"Our (investigative) series isn't starting until next week," said RGJ's Executive Editor Kelly Ann Scott. "In 2014, the RGJ used 4.9 million gallons of water and ranked as No. 124 among TMWA commercial users, according to the RGJ analysis of TMWA data."

What the TWMA data also show is that RGJ increased its water use in 2014 from 2012 and 2013. The company's water use in 2012, ranked as number 135 in commercial water users, was 4,572,000 gallons. In 2013, RGJ dropped to 144, using 4,208,000 gallons of water. But in 2014, RGJ's water use hit a high of 4,903,000 gallons, ranking 124, as Scott said, among commercial water users. That's 695,000 gallons more in 2014 than in 2013, both drought years.

When asked about the RGJ's water consumption, Scott said, "so far this year (2015), we've made landscaping changes here that are intended to reduce our water use significantly. We also have made initial inquiries about having TMWA do a water audit.

"All of this analysis is a large reason why we launched the Water Savers Club. We want to find ways as a community to do better. The intent of the water club isn't shaming; it's education. And we are part of that, too."

When asked about the landscaping changes and savings, she added:

*"We redid the landscaping around our building and changed our irrigation levels and timing. The changes were made within the last two months. I can't access our billing to pull up our usage year over year so far, but I can tell you after talking with our finance department that our water bill(s) are down 19 percent for the first five months of this year compared to last year. Presumably that's because we're using less water.*

*"In May – which is the time that water bills tend to increase because of landscaping, according to our RGJ analysis – our bill was down 25.5 percent year over year."*

RGJ is right to encourage us to conserve water — residential users make up the majority of TMWA's total system consumption, so collective conservation by residents can have a system-wide impact.

Certainly all media can and should help TMWA get out conservation messages; to date, TMWA has been on the right track, announcing recently that a call for a 10-percent water reduction ended [up being 19 percent](#), and its board [voted to end flat-rate charging of customers in October](#).

But we haven't answered the headline's original question: Is RGJ a top water user?

They are ranked 124 among commercial users in 2014, and how they use the water should also be considered.

Since RGJ's water use can arguably be considered primarily private, its increase in water use, the voluminous jump from 2013 to 2014, should raise the question why the RGJ, after numerous articles written about drought and water issues, has not been conserving more proactively — until this year.

RELATED:

- [Water Supply: Customers Reduce Water Use by 19 Percent in...](#)
- [TMWA Calls for 10-Percent Reduction in Water Use: Watch...](#)
- [TMWA Customer Flat-Rate Water Use Ending in October](#)
- [Fact-check Friday: What's the Best Way for Our Region...](#)
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# Editor's note: RGJ series examines water use in time of drought

Kelly Ann Scott 6:58 p.m. PDT June 19, 2015



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Kelly Ann Scott, executive editor of the Reno Gazette-Journal.(Photo: RGJ)Buy Photo

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This reporting on our region's water use is the first in a four-part series examining the drought's effects on our way of life in the Truckee Meadows.

We will bring you more in the months ahead — an examination of commercial water use in July, a look at the relationship between water and agriculture in August, and we will finish in September with a deep dive into the question of what is the future of our water system.

To do this reporting, we requested public data a year ago from the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, including the top 1,000 users in many different categories. While the water authority initially denied the request, the RGJ used Nevada's Open Records Law to obtain this data.

Our reporting isn't intended to shame the top users; it's intended to give our community the facts we need about our water use so that a meaningful conversation about our future can ensue. That's why we've included a digital map of the top users in our area without naming them.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

[RGJ Investigates: We're using more water today than in 2011](#)

The reporting reveals a fact about our community's water use that surprised me: Despite the increased awareness of the drought, as a community we used more water in 2014 than we did in 2011, the last year we had a healthy snowpack.

Even water use here at RGJ Media mirrors that trend. While we will report on our own use in our examination of commercial water consumption, we need to acknowledge now that we, too, used more water in 2014 than we did in 2011.

In 2011, the RGJ used 4.1 million gallons, making us the 134th highest commercial user in TMWA, according to our analysis. And, in 2014, we used 4.9 million gallons and ranked No. 124 in commercial use, the analysis found.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

[Saving water during drought: Do we do enough?](#)

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In the last two months, we've made changes to our landscaping and irrigation system aimed at reducing water use. And we're in the first stages of asking for a water audit from TMWA to examine other ways we can conserve.

We're also introducing the RGJ Water Savers Club today to help you find ways to conserve, track your use and share your tips and tricks. We are planning several events to help you learn more about water in our region. The club's goal is to help one another save 5 million gallons.

I have already signed up and am eager to track the results from water-saving irrigation systems that I installed in my garden. I'll be sharing my results through the club, too.

I'm hopeful that this reporting will help Northern Nevadans understand their day-to-day use. It's hard to know if you're using more than the average person without understanding the baselines for our community — and our reporting provides you that.

— *Kelly Ann Scott, executive editor of RGJ Media*

# RGJ Investigates: We're using more water today than in 2011

WE ANALYZED HOW WE'RE USING WATER AS OUR COMMUNITY GRAPPLES  
WITH A DROUGHT FOUR YEARS IN DURATION.

*Jeff DeLong, RGJ (/staff/12455/jeff-delong)*



**Our community uses more water now than in 2011, the last year with a healthy snowpack.** Four years ago, residential and business customers consumed 18.8 billion gallons of water. In 2014 they drank up 21.3 billion gallons — a 13 percent increase.

**Our average household use has gone up:** In 2011, residents used on average 117,000 gallons. In 2014, that number was 121,000 gallons. For a typical home, 61,000 of those gallons went to landscaping.

**When people are not billed on a meter, they use dramatically more water.** In 2014, the average flat-rate home consumed 281,000 gallons, more than double the 121,000 gallons the average metered home used. Although just 7 percent of residential customers — in homes and apartments — are billed on a flat rate, they accounted for 20 percent of the residential water used last year.



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**

[Despite high water use, flat-rate billing here until fall](#)

<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/despite-high-water-use-flat-rate-billing-fall/29012513/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>



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[Saving water during drought: Do we do enough?](#)

<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/saving-water-drought-enough/29012473/>

While water officials say they're prepared to handle another dry year, it's the possibility of the next dry year that worries them.

"It could be a tipping point in terms of answering whether this is the worst drought on record," said Mark Foree, general manager of TMWA.

"Right now I would say it's not. Another very dry year could tell us we now have a new, worst drought on record."

Such tipping points can alter water policy across the West, said Buzz Thompson, an expert in environmental resources at Stanford Law School.

"Every prior drought I have seen has led to some type of significant change in the way we manage water," Thompson said.



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**

[Editor's note: RGJ series examines water use in time of drought](#)

<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/editors-note-rgj-series-examines-water-use-time-drought/29009625/>



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**

[Join the RGJ Water Savers Club](#)

<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/17/join-rgj-water-savers-club/28886553/>

# Weather, growth play role in increased water use

PRESS CLIPS

## WATER USE IS DEPENDENT ON THE WEATHER

After the Sierra's driest winter on record extended the drought to its fourth year, water systems are being challenged to a degree described as unprecedented.

Yet here in Northern Nevada, TMWA customers used more water in 2014 than in 2011, the last year of normal precipitation, according to the RGJ analysis.

TMWA's 77,675 metered residential customers — out of 92,538 total customers — used 1.2 billion gallons more in 2014 than in 2011. That was a 12.2 percent increase, according to the RGJ analysis.

Factors contributing to the increase include the weather patterns and economy.

The Truckee River is seen approximately a half mile downstream from Lake Tahoe on May 27, 2015.

(Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)

Fall of 2014 was warmer than usual, driving up water use in October and November, Foree said.



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**  
TMWA: This is who controls our water

[\(http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/tmwa-runs/29007947/\)](http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/tmwa-runs/29007947/)

"Water use is very dependent on what the weather is doing," he said. "2011 was a really, really wet year. 2014 was a really, really dry year."

Then there's the improving economy. About 2,000 more buildings are occupied now than in 2011. And as residents have started to see an economic uptick, they're using more water, Foree said.

Despite the increase, Northern Nevadans appear to be looking for ways to conserve and cut back when asked.

TMWA residential customers cut water use in August and September 2014 by 11 percent, saving 1.6 billion gallons, when the utility asked for a 10 percent reduction.

Aided by spring rains, water use this year dropped 19 percent in May compared to the same month in 2013.

Water officials also have seen an upsurge in the water audits they conduct to detect water-wasting problems such as seeping pipes or leaking toilets.

After an article by the RGJ highlighted the free program, the number of audits conducted in September and October 2014 shot up by more than 50 percent. That pattern appears to be holding true in 2015.

"It's very popular," said Andy Gebhardt, manager of customer services for the utility.

# Who's using the most?

PRESS CLIPS

THESE ELITE RENO PROPERTIES ARE THE LARGEST WATER USERS

The biggest residential water user in the Truckee Meadows is a golf course no one plays.

The 18-acre course, built decades ago by the late gaming pioneer William Pennington for his personal use, consumed 11 million gallons in 2014. That water was billed at a flat rate — costing a fraction of what average consumers pay per gallon.

And while the golf course had cut its water use from 2013, its consumption still dwarfed the rest of the top 10, which used between 2.7 million and 4.6 million gallons in 2014.

Of the top 10 users, nine were billed a flat rate. Only No. 8 Rancharrah, the southwest Reno estate owned by Harrah Family Trust, was billed on a meter.

A private golf course built by gaming pioneer William Pennington consumed some 11 million gallons in 2014, making the property the Reno area's top flat rate water user.

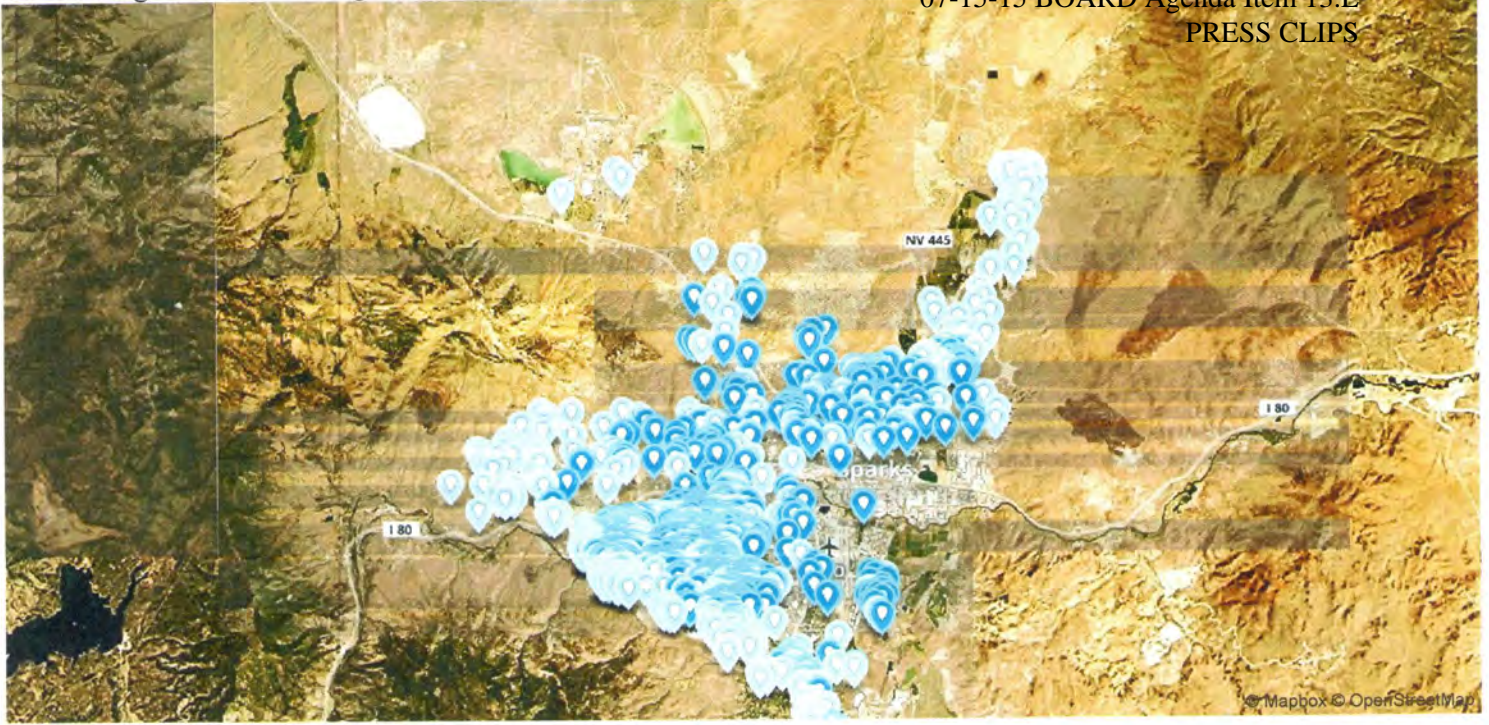
*(Photo: Jeff DeLong/RGJ)*

Here is a map

([https://api.tiles.mapbox.com/v4/renogazette.mbj7aml6/page.html?access\\_token=pk.eyJ1ljoicmVub2dhemV0dGUiLCJhIjoiWEI5anRacyJ9.Tttu7gZJbhpUX\\_pgAiczCO#11/39.5769/-119.8141](https://api.tiles.mapbox.com/v4/renogazette.mbj7aml6/page.html?access_token=pk.eyJ1ljoicmVub2dhemV0dGUiLCJhIjoiWEI5anRacyJ9.Tttu7gZJbhpUX_pgAiczCO#11/39.5769/-119.8141))

of where the top 1,000 metered and top 1,000 flat rate users live in Reno-Sparks. Most of these customers live in Reno's Old Southwest neighborhood. Of the top 10 users only one is on a meter.

**Click on each data point for more information Dark blue represents the top flat-rate users and the light blue represents the top metered users. Flat-rate users pay a single fee regardless of how much water they use while metered users pay by the gallon.**



[Here's a link to the entire database](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Q8AHtG2oKSI8wRQamEdi3Gi2OprPfpxnR8TPUI7Z9AA/edit?usp=sharing)

[\(https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Q8AHtG2oKSI8wRQamEdi3Gi2OprPfpxnR8TPUI7Z9AA/edit?usp=sharing\)](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Q8AHtG2oKSI8wRQamEdi3Gi2OprPfpxnR8TPUI7Z9AA/edit?usp=sharing) of the top 1,000 metered and top 1,000 flat-rate users in the TMWA system.

While the Pennington course's four greens and 10 tee boxes may have had some use in recent years, no one is golfing there anymore, said Kent Green, manager of Western Equities LLC, which owns the property at 2600 Greensboro Dr.

"It's unplayable now. It's been unplayable for two years," Green said. "I think you would be better off going to one of those sandlots."

Western Equities has taken measures to reduce consumption and is now only watering once a week across most of the property.

"We're just keeping it at the edge of being alive," Green said. "We can't let it go too bad because it would just turn to dust."

Green said recently repaired leaks in a swimming pool and fountain are likely to further reduce water use. So far this year, the golf course has used 587,000 gallons, according to TMWA.

Another big water user trying to do better is Chris Castel, whose South Arlington Avenue estate was once owned by Charlie Mapes of Reno's iconic Mapes Hotel. Castel used more than 3.6 million gallons in 2014, earning him the No. 5 position on the list of top water users.

Since Castel bought the estate in 2000, he's spent more than \$100,000 to upgrade the system irrigating his tree-studded, 3.3-acre property and is in the process of installing a state-of-the-art weather station that measures temperature, wind and humidity to control irrigation by computer.

"We're working diligently to reduce water during this time that we're under stress," Castel said. "The road we're on is to try to get our utilization to the minimum possible without damaging the trees."

Thomas Belaustegui, the No. 3 water user in town, said a failing well forced him to use TMWA water in recent years on his 2.5-acre property. He plans to deepen the well to lessen his need for utility water and is also trying to cut back on overall consumption. Belaustegui used 4.4 million gallons in 2014.

Rancharrah in southwest Reno, the No. 8 water user in the Truckee Meadows Water Authority system. It was the No. 1 metered user in 2014.

*(Photo: Brian Duggan/RGJ)*

And while he is willing to reduce, Belaustegui sees a disconnect between requests to do so and ongoing growth.

"I know we live in the desert, but how come we're building all these new homes?" Belaustegui said. "Please don't ask me to let my yard go dry to build more apartments."



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**  
Confessions of an accidental water waster

[\(http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/21/confessions-accidental-water-waster/29012481/\)](http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/21/confessions-accidental-water-waster/29012481/)



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**  
A top water user, TMWA board member says she's cutting back

[\(http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/top-water-user-tmwa-board-member-says-cutting-back/29008883/\)](http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/top-water-user-tmwa-board-member-says-cutting-back/29008883/)

## How do we compare?

OTHER WESTERN COMMUNITIES HAVE SIMILAR  
WATER NEEDS AS WASHOE COUNTY

States, counties and communities are struggling with drought conditions across the West.

Earlier this month, drought-stricken California ordered farmers in the Sacramento, San Joaquin and delta watersheds to stop pumping water, one of the largest cuts on record affecting holders of senior water rights.

The Las Vegas area is dealing with a drought even longer in duration than the one

Southern Nevada's drought, which officially started in 2002, has lowered Lake Mead by about 130 feet, raising concerns that if the drought continues, water levels will drop too low to be accessed by intake lines, said Bronson Mack, spokesman for the Southern Nevada Water Authority. The authority provides water for 2 million residents and 40 million annual visitors.

To address the danger of being cut off from its major water source, the authority is now finishing work on an \$817 million project to build a new 3-mile-long intake tunnel that will allow access to water at lower levels.

The Las Vegas area has substantially reduced water consumption through aggressive conservation since the drought began in 2002, Mack said. The authority has spent \$197 million in a program to encourage people to remove turf, with some 174 million square feet pulled out so far.

The authority also initiated a mandatory assigned-day watering program similar to the one in Reno-Sparks.

**The Hoover Dam and the "bathtub ring" at Lake Mead are seen on March 13, 2015.**

*(Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)*

"It's the right thing to do because we live in the desert," Mack said. "We as Nevadans have to be stewards of state resources."

When it comes to how much water people in Washoe County consume compared to other Western communities, the answer varies depending on where you look.

In Washoe County, each person needed about 142 gallons a day in 2010 for domestic purposes like dishwashers, showers and, especially, lawns. That figure is according to the latest survey of public water supplies conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey. That's roughly on par with similar Western communities such as Idaho's Ada County, home to Boise — at 141 gallons a day per person — and Salt Lake County, Utah's 143 gallons.

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Washoe's water use looks conservative when compared to Weber County, home to Ogden, Utah, north of Salt Lake City. People there used 198 gallons per day per person in 2010.

But compared to some of the largest cities on the West Coast, Washoe County is a water glutton.

Residents in San Francisco County used 52 gallons a day. Washington County, Ore., which includes Portland suburbs, used about 54 gallons a day. Those communities are, of course, on or near the coast with cool and rainy conditions significantly different from Reno's high desert climate. Many urban homes also don't have water-hungry lawns.

## Lessons lead to changes

### PAST DROUGHTS HAVE LED TO MAJOR CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Other droughts have hit the West and hit it hard.

One that has drawn widespread comparisons to the current situation was a two-year dry span that occurred in 1976 and 1977, when the Sierra snowpack reached an all-time low that wasn't exceeded in severity until this past winter.

Another lengthy drought occurred from 1987 to 1994, an event that dried up a stretch of the Truckee River in Reno and brought Lake Tahoe below its natural rim for four and a half years during a five-year period.

Following the '70s drought, officials in many cities realized they only had one water source, a situation that put them at extreme risk. Many immediately started efforts to tap groundwater or link to other water supplies as backup, said Thompson, of Stanford.

During and after the drought that ended in 1994, one change was a major expansion in water conservation measures taken by communities, he said.

That happened in Reno.

The area's former private water provider, Sierra Pacific Power Co., initiated conservation efforts still active to this day — assigned-day watering and water waster patrols.

Before the drought, there were no restrictions on when homes and businesses across the Truckee Meadows could water lawns and other landscaping. A system was established to assign watering days based on address numbers, with watering now allowed three days per week.

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### **THIS IS HOW THE DROUGHT IS AFFECTING YOUR LIFE**

Nevada is in the grip of a drought now four years in duration. Impacts are mounting. What are they?

In a program being significantly expanded this summer, utility employees patrol the community looking for people violating assigned-day watering rules or otherwise wasting water.

Shortly after the water authority was formed in 2001, Reno, Sparks and Washoe County agreed to give the utility authority to fine chronic water wasters. While the program places an emphasis on warnings and public education, more than 100 citations — which come with a \$25 fine for a first offense and \$75 for subsequent ones — have been issued over the years, utility officials said.

"There was a big push on conservation," said Shane Stoddard, senior resource economist for the Truckee Meadows Water Authority, of changes in the wake of the last drought.

"That was the first significant drought this area had to deal with in terms of municipal supplies. In that way, it was a blessing to the community.

"I think there's a lot of memory of that last drought that caused people to be cognitive of their water use."

If the current drought continues into a fifth year, the challenge of conservation will take on renewed urgency.

Thompson predicts a number of possibilities. Some coastal communities in California are looking into desalination of seawater. Thompson anticipates a substantial increase in recycling wastewater, which he said is underused across the West.

Thompson also expects many communities to rethink what they charge for water, essentially making those who use the most pay significantly more for every drop. Changing what people pay for water is something TMWA would consider if the drought continues, water officials said.

"It's a very effective way to have people conserve," Thompson said of changing the pricing structure. "The advantage is that water charges don't hit the poor. If you're just getting by and don't use much water, you don't have to pay much. But if you're somebody that uses tremendous amounts, you will have incentive to use less.

"I think we're going to be seeing a lot more of that."

## How we did it

A year ago when the Truckee Meadows was mired in its third year of drought, the Reno Gazette-Journal requested that water-use data for the Truckee Meadows Water Authority be made public to examine how our community is using water.

While the water authority initially denied the request, the RGJ pursued the information and successfully obtained it from TMWA by using Nevada's public record laws.

In the past six months, the RGJ requested a database of the top 1,000 metered residential users, the top 1,000 flat-rate residential users and the top 1,000 commercial users based on the number of gallons they consumed in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. Using this information, the RGJ was able to analyze how much water the top users in town consume.

Because the water consumption data was obtained from TMWA, it does not include homes and businesses in the Arrowcreek, Double Diamond or Geiger Grade neighborhoods because those customers were served by the Washoe County Department of Water Resources in 2014. Those 24,000 homes and businesses became TMWA customers on Jan. 1.

The Reno Gazette-Journal also obtained water user data for the top 1,000 commercial users in the Truckee Meadows. The commercial data, which includes hotels, industry and small businesses, will be the focus of an upcoming RGJ analysis later this summer.

# What we found

**When people are not billed on a meter, they use dramatically more water — especially during a drought:** The average flat-rate home consumed 281,000 gallons in 2014, more than double the 121,000 gallons of water the average metered home used last year. And while flat-rate residential customers, including apartment complexes, made up about 7.2 percent of all residential customers, they consumed about 20 percent of the 14.6 billion gallons used by residential customers last year. As of December 2014, TMWA had 6,020 flat-rate residential customers.

The Stampede Reservoir is seen on May 27, 2015.

(Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**

Despite high water use, flat-rate billing here until fall

<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/despite-high-water-use-flat-rate-billing-fall/29012513/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**

Saving water during drought: Do we do enough?

<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/saving-water-drought-enough/29012473/>

**Most of us are using more water than in 2011, the last year that started with a healthy snowpack.** Four years ago, all TMWA customers consumed 18.8 billion gallons of water. In 2014 they drank up 21.3 billion gallons — a 13 percent increase. TMWA's 77,675 metered residential customers used 130.6 million more gallons in 2014 than in 2013 — a 1.1 percent increase. Metered residential customers made up the majority of TMWA's 92,538 customers in 2014.

**The average residential user is consuming more water.** The average residential user in Reno-Sparks used 3.4 percent more water in 2014 than in 2011, from 117,000 gallons a year to 121,000 gallons. Nearly half of those 121,000 gallons is needed inside the home while the rest is used for landscaping — from watering the lawn to maintaining gardens, according to TMWA. For a typical home, some 61,000 gallons per year are typically used for irrigation.

**Of the top 10 residential water users, only one was billed on a meter.** Following Pennington's golf course, the remaining top 10 users in town last year used between 2.7 million to 4.6 million gallons of water. Only Harrah Family Trust's Rancharra, the No. 8 user in town, was billed on a meter.

**We are cutting back when asked.** TMWA customers as a whole cut back their water use in August and September last year by 11 percent, or about 1.6 billion gallons of water, when the water utility asked them to cut back by 10 percent. So far this year, conservation efforts are having an effect. Water use in the Reno area dropped 19 percent in May compared to the same month in 2013.

PRESS CLIPS

**Top users use seven times more than average user in 2014.** At an average of 819,833 gallons a year, the top 1,000 residential water users in the Truckee Meadows Water Authority system used nearly seven times more water than the average water customer, who used 121,000 gallons. Compared to the average flat-rate user, the top 1,000 users consumed three times as much water.

**Residential use makes up the highest percentage of water use.** Residential water users consumed 68.5 percent of the 21.3 billion gallons used by TMWA customers in 2014. The remaining 31.5 percent was used by commercial customers.

**The No. 1 residential customer used 11 million gallons of water in 2014.** The property is a private golf course at 2600 Greensboro Drive that is owned by the late William Pennington's estate. It's a flat-rate customer that used an estimated 12.3 million gallons in 2013.

**The No. 1 metered residential user consumed 2.8 million gallons in 2014.** The property is Rancharrah, which consumed 5.6 million gallons in 2012.

**Based on its water use, it would take the Pennington golf course three weeks to fill an Olympic swimming pool.** That's enough to fill 17 Olympic swimming pools in a year at 11 million gallons. Meanwhile, it would take an average water user in town about five and a half years to fill an Olympic swimming pool at 121,000 gallons a year. For a top-1,000 user in town, it would take about 10 months to do so at 819,833 gallons a year.

Lake Tahoe is seen at Kings Beach on May 26, 2015.  
(Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)

**The Pennington golf course property is billed the highest flat rate for residential customers at \$634 per month, or \$7,608 per year.** The golf course would pay \$7,608 whether it used 11 million gallons of water or twice that amount because it is billed at the highest flat-rate tier. That breaks down to about 15 gallons per penny.

**100 flat-rate residential users consumed more than 1 million gallons of water in 2014, down from 123 in 2012.** For metered users, 48 customers consumed more than 1 million gallons in 2014, down from a high of 60 in 2012.

**The top 1,000 metered residential users consumed about 15 percent more water in 2014 than in 2011 when the drought started.** Meanwhile, the top 1,000 flat-rate users shaved about 1 percent in the same time period. Since 2013, both metered and flat rate customers have cut their water use by 1 percent and 3 percent, respectively.

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**MEET THE REPORTER, EDITOR**

# Saving water during drought: Do we do enough?

CRITICS INSIST NOT ENOUGH IS BEING DONE TO SAVE WATER OR PREPARE  
FOR EXTENDED DROUGHT

*Jeff DeLong, RGJ (/staff/12455/jeff-delong)*

# 'We can't live without it'

'BUT WE WASTE A HECK OF A LOT OF IT.'

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(<http://plus.google.com/share?url=http%3A/on.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/saving-water-drought-enough/29012473>)

(<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/saving-water-drought-enough/29012473>) Comment

Just about everyone thought three would be it.

Three winters of disappointing snowfall. Three seasons of wilting crops and drying forests. Three hot summers of dropping rivers, lakes and reservoirs.

A respite was not to be. With the past winter the driest yet, Nevada is firmly stuck in a drought now four years in duration.

For the Reno-Tahoe area, the most significant impact is the drop-by-drop loss of precious water — a problem serious enough that the region's major water provider might be forced to raise the cost of water, at least for some, next year.

Lake Tahoe, the region's most important reservoir, has been at or below its natural rim for eight months, cutting off flow into the Truckee River. All the river's other reservoirs are way down as well. And, the river is flowing at levels not seen last year until the middle of summer.

To meet demand, backup water supplies will soon be needed and Reno-area residents and businesses are already being asked to cut water use.

### Other stories from our investigation into local residential water use



#### RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL

[RGJ Investigates: We're using more water today than in 2011](#)

(<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/rgj-investigates-using-water-today/28949079/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>)



#### RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL

[Despite high water use, flat-rate billing here until fall](#)

In this drought-vulnerable place about to grow significantly, some critics suggest not enough is being done to conserve limited water supplies and say the current drought is making the problem all too clear.

"This drought, quite frankly, has exceeded anything we've ever known before. We're really in uncharted territory," said Susan Lynn, a Reno conservationist and water expert.

"It is totally critical that we have water," Lynn said. "We can't live without it, but we waste a heck of a lot of it."

While the situation may be serious, it's not unprecedented, and well-laid plans are in place to survive extended drought, counters Mark Foree, general manager of the Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

"We've been here before and worse," Foree said, referring to the eight-year drought that ended in 1994. "We've been planning for droughts like this for years. I know certainly there are opposing points of view out there, but I have a tremendous amount of confidence."

That said, the situation's severity is emphasized in a number of ways:

**For the second summer in a row, the water authority is asking customers to reduce water consumption by 10 percent** — more if possible — in an effort to save about 1.6 billion gallons of water and maintain adequate supplies through the summer.

**For the second summer, the utility will tap drought reserves stored in upstream reservoirs.** Before 2014, it hadn't needed to do so since the tail end of that lengthy drought 20 years earlier.

**Drought conditions renewed debate** — and led to a final decision — over the need to switch the last remaining flat-rate water customers to metered service, which encourages conservation. Flat-rate customers are billed the same amount no matter how much water they use, while those on metered service are billed on the actual amount of water consumed. With few exceptions, all water customers will be billed with meters come Oct. 1.

The Stampede Reservoir is seen on May 27, 2015.

(Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)

**Should the drought continue, there's a possibility the water authority might next year consider altering billing practices** to charge those using the most water significantly more than under the utility's current practices. High water users could be charged more per gallon than those using less, or everyone could pay more for water during summer months or during periods of drought.





A time lapse look at the drought and our dwindling water supply as we head into the summer season

*Jason Bean & Jeff DeLong*

## Is our drought plan adequate?

Steps such as forcing all customers onto a water meter and charging significantly more money for heavy users are overdue, insists Lynn, a 17-year member of the former Regional Water Planning Commission and a 10-year volunteer with the Great Basin Water Network.

Lynn said existing drought plans may appear sufficient in the context of droughts experienced in recent history. It's the possibility of a "new normal" of extended droughts that has her worried.

"For anything outside our historic knowledge I don't think we're ready," Lynn said. "I think we need to rethink our definition of drought in this community."

With the region now in its fourth straight year of extremely dry conditions, the adequacy of the water authority's drought plan could be called to question, said Steve Bradhurst, a former Washoe County commissioner and former head of the Washoe County Department of Water Resources.

Were he an appointee to the authority's board, Bradhurst said, he would want to take another look at the drought plan and how it might stand up to an even longer drought than currently envisioned. He also said it may be near the time to force people to conserve water through a mandatory program rather than just ask them to do so.

"There are a lot of questions I would want to have answered," Bradhurst said. "What does it mean if we have another dry year? Or more? We need to completely understand where we are today and where we are going."

## Saving water during drought: Do we do enough?

With the community poised for significant growth, significant attention should be directed toward limited water resources and how they can accommodate growth — particularly in view of uncertainties posed by a warming climate, argues Bob Fulkerson of the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada.

He describes the existing drought plan as "the pray-for-rain approach to water supply."

"Hoping we will roll lucky sevens next winter is not good planning," Fulkerson said. "Our demands for water are going to soon exceed nature's ability to provide for those demands. We're too close for comfort."

An avid fly fisherman with a passion for the Truckee River, Shane Ritter started an online petition several months ago urging the water authority and cities of Reno and Sparks to step up conservation measures and consider such steps as importing water. The petition has garnered more than 550 supporters, many from the Reno area.

"We do need to be more aggressive," Ritter said. "I feel like we're a little flat-footed. In the region we live in, it's not going to get any easier into the future."

While Foree said he understands the concerns expressed by Lynn and others, he insists there are adequate water resources to serve the Truckee Meadows now and into the future, with the area's population expected to increase from roughly 440,000 today to about 560,000 people in 2030, according to projections.

The water authority has plans in place to weather a drought nine years in duration, assuming backup supplies are periodically bolstered over that period. The model is based on that last major drought that lasted from 1987 to 1994, with an extra year thrown in. That period did include one average precipitation year and one very wet one mixed in with the dry.

The nine-year drought plan is designed to ensure the region weathers a situation exactly like the one it now faces, Foree said. He acknowledges the stretch of four straight years of below-normal precipitation does represent a departure from past droughts when wet years helped offset impacts of the dry ones.

"That's what is different, we've had four consecutive years and we haven't seen that before," Foree said.

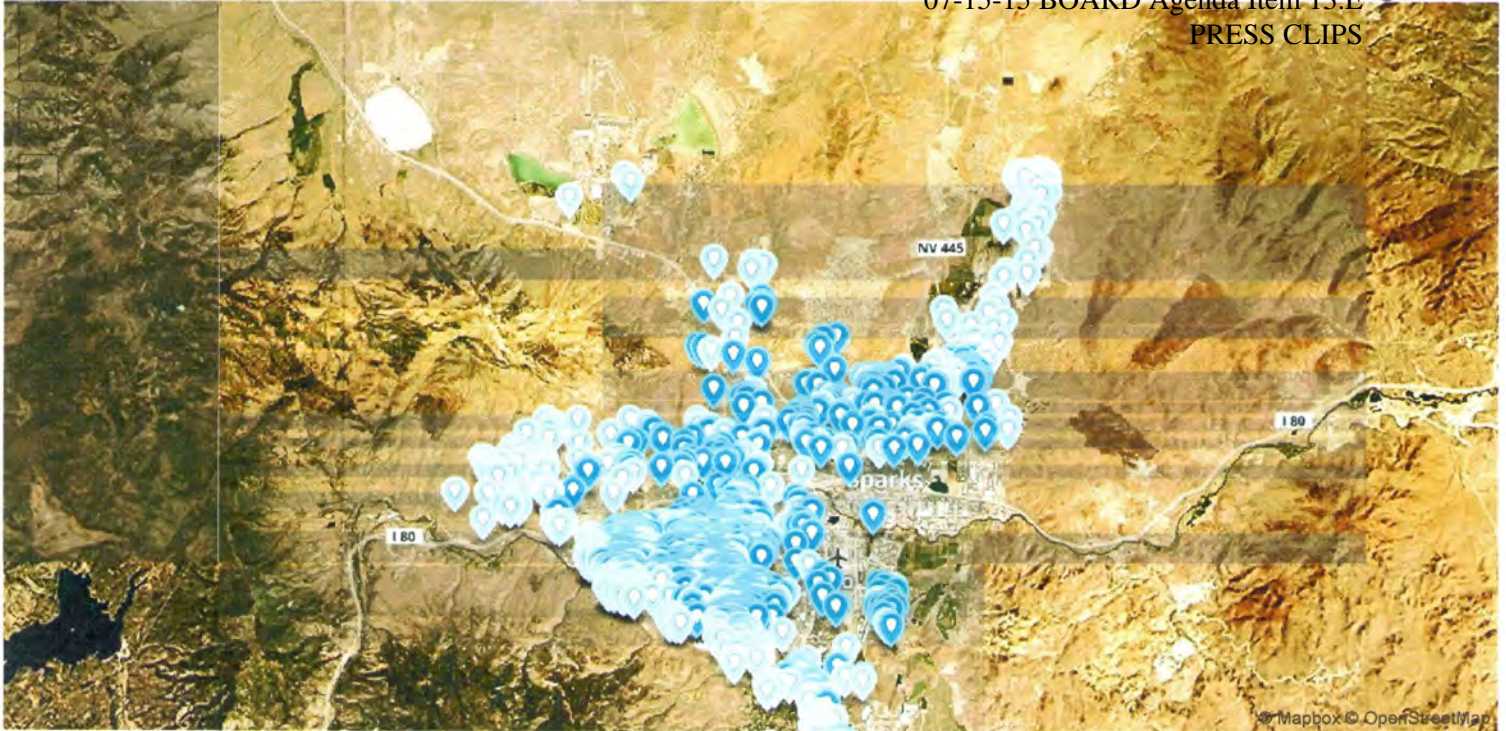
**Below is a map of the top 1,000 metered and top 1,000 flat-rate water users in the Truckee Meadows Water Authority system from 2014. Click on each data point for more information about their water use.**

07-15-15 BOARD Agenda Item 13.E  
PRESS CLIPS



Images from the drought stricken Washoe Lake in June 2015.

(Photo: Andy Barron/RGJ)



To see the entire database of top water users in Reno-Sparks, [click on this link \(https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Q8AhtG2oKSl8wRQamEdi3Gi2OprPfpnxR8TPUI7Z9AA/edit?usp=sharing\)](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Q8AhtG2oKSl8wRQamEdi3Gi2OprPfpnxR8TPUI7Z9AA/edit?usp=sharing).

## Should we cut more than 10 percent?

Lynn sees a clear need for increased water conservation and suggests the 10-percent reduction asked for now is insufficient.

"I feel like we ought to be doing 15 percent this summer. I'm surprised we didn't do it last year," Lynn said. If next winter is another severely dry one, she could envision mandatory cuts in water use of 25 to 30 percent — similar to those now being required in California — as the situation here worsens.

But Foree said 10 percent was the cutback that TMWA officials expected customers could reasonably achieve this year through a voluntary request.



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**  
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[\(http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/18/join-rgj-water-savers-club/28886553/\)](http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/18/join-rgj-water-savers-club/28886553/)



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**  
Editor's note: RGJ series examines water use in time of drought

<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/19/editors-note-rgj-series-examines-water-use-time-drought/29009625/>

PRESS CLIPS

The request is on par with the one made last year, the first time the utility has ever asked customers to cut water use. Residential customers actually exceeded the requested amount, reducing water use by about 11 percent.

The reduction is designed to respond to the drought in conjunction with the move to again tap drought reserves.

Last year, about 4,900 acre feet of reserves were used. This summer, the utility expects to use about 7,000 acre feet. About 26,000 acre feet of backup water designated for drought use is available.

## Should we charge big water users more money?

Lynn favors adoption of a program that penalizes big water users by charging them substantially more for water consumed, programs to reduce sod at homes and golf courses, expanded use of recycled water and cutting the days watering is allowed from three days per week to two.

Reducing the number of days watering is allowed, Foree said, would not save water. Studies indicate people limited to two watering days as opposed to three can actually use more during those two days, he said.

"We've proven three days a week watering does not use more than two days," Foree said. "Even I was a little skeptical but that has been the case."

Programs to subsidize removal of turf similar to what's been done in Las Vegas are expensive and might not be fair to residents who have already taken costly steps to make their land drought-tolerant, Foree said, but he added such programs might be considered someday.



**RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL**  
[Join the RGJ Water Savers Club](#)

<http://www.rgj.com/story/news/2015/06/18/join-rgj-water-savers-club/28886553/>

The utility is continually monitoring the latest science to determine whether changes in water resource management are justified due to climate change, Foree said.

It recently approved a \$30,000 contract with Franco Biondi, a scientist at University of Nevada, Reno, to examine recent climate research and how it might apply specifically to this region. Biondi's findings, which will also revisit the issue of drought frequency in the West, are expected late this summer.

One big change that could be coming should the drought continue is a change in billing structure that charges big water users much more than currently, Foree said. Making water more expensive could in the end prove to be the best way to achieve savings in excess of the 10 percent now being sought, he said.

PRESS CLIPS

"If this drought continues, perhaps those things would be considered," Foree said. "If we have another season like this, we might have to look at something like that early next year."

But a single big winter can go a long way when it comes to filling Tahoe and other reservoirs, Foree and colleagues said. And historically, droughts have been offset by wet years.

Toward the end of the drought period commonly known as the Dust Bowl, Lake Tahoe had lowered to about a foot above its natural rim.

When full, the Tahoe City Dam stores an additional 6.1 feet above the lake's rim for downstream use. A big precipitation year in 1938 pushed Tahoe's levels up 5 feet — some 195 billion gallons — and filled the lake, Foree said.

In 1994 and at the end of the last major drought, Tahoe sat at 2 feet below its rim. By 1996 after some big winters, the lake was full. Similar turnarounds occurred in 2006 and 2011.

The Truckee River is seen flowing into downtown Reno on May 28, 2015.

(Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)

"My alarm bell is not going off," said John Erwin, the utility's director of natural resources. "Based on what we know, we do anticipate a recovery."

998,000 gallons of water in 2014, down from 1.1 million the year before, according to the records obtained by the RGJ. Lowden acknowledges everyone must start cutting back.

to be billed by meters. That steady change was one reason utility officials never felt hard-pressed to force the issue for the last holdouts. The idea to finally flip the switch for all

meter for years. Murphy said she can't understand how the utility board could decide at the same time to delay the flat-rate conver-

be a big challenge," Lowden said. "I agree that heavy use of water in the desert isn't the smartest thing in the world. We do have to make plans for the future."

## A TRUCKEE MEADOWS WATER AUTHORITY TIMELINE

**OCTOBER 2001:**  
Water meter retrofit program approved.

**NOVEMBER 2001:**  
TMWA determines acceleration of conversion of flat-rate customers to metered service in community's best interest. First-time single-family residential customers are all billed at metered rates.

**MARCH 2003:**  
TMWA reaffirms meter retrofit goal.

**OCTOBER 2003:**  
TMWA board directs staff to explore acceleration of meter retrofit.

**DECEMBER 2007:**  
Board considers requiring full conversion amid opposition. By split vote, board members decide to require meter conversion by January 2010.

**APRIL 2009:**  
Board decides conversion should be required "no sooner" than June 2010. Action not finalized.

**OCTOBER 2014:**  
Board decides to revisit meter conversion issue.

**DECEMBER 2014:**  
Board directs staff to pursue timeline for full conversion by June 1, 2015.

**MARCH 2015:**  
Full conversion delayed until October 2015.

[RGJ.COM/SIERRADROUGHT](http://RGJ.COM/SIERRADROUGHT)

# Sierra Sage golf course recycles water to keep greens greener

- [Video](#)

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## [Course Recycled Water](#)



[Print Story](#)

Published: 6/22 5:24 pm

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Updated: 6/22 5:26 pm

RENO, Nev. (KARNV & MyNews4.com)--As drought conditions continue to put more restrictions on water use and limit outdoor irrigation throughout the region, golfers can expect one oasis of green at Washoe County's Sierra Sage Golf Course in Stead.

The Sage has been irrigating its 140 acres with recycled water from the City of Reno's Stead Water Reclamation Facility since 2000. The course uses an average of 600,000 gallons a day during the summer.

The golf course is the treatment plant's largest customer for the sand filtered, biologically treated and disinfected water that is pumped into the Sierra Sage lakes and ponds for on-course application. Treated effluent from the plant is also used for irrigation at the North Valleys Regional Park sports fields, Mayors Park in Stead and by dust control trucks operating at local construction sites, according to Robert Zoncki, plant operator for the City of Reno.

A typical home uses about one half of an acre-foot of water annually. Golf courses a lot more. As the West struggles with leaner snow packs, water reuse and recycling are just one of the tricks golf operators must use to keep the players happy and the course open for play, said Mike Mazzaferri, president of Cal-Mazz Golf which operates Sierra Sage for Washoe County.

Sierra Sage employs many other water savings tricks in the way it manages its acres of grass, Mazzaferri said. The course has reduced turf areas, employs sophisticated computer-aided sprinkler systems and has planted new drought tolerant trees.

The Stead Plant treats about 1.4 million gallons of sewage each day and has a capacity of about 2 million gallons.

## TMWA Taps Drought Reserves to Increase Flow in Truckee River

Posted: Jun 23, 2015 6:37 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, June 23, 2015 9:37 PM EDT</em> Updated: Jun 23, 2015 6:40 PM PDT  
<em class="wnDate">Tuesday, June 23, 2015 9:40 PM EDT</em>

By Jennifer Burton

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The Truckee Meadows Water Authority had to step in this weekend to supplement the Truckee River with water from Boca Reservoir, which itself is hovering around 15% capacity. TMWA Senior Hydrologist, Bill Hauck, says customer demands for water have been increasing with the hot, dry weather. "Right now the way it stands, there's not enough water in the Truckee River to keep our treatment plants online, so we're augmenting. We're supplementing with releases of drought reserves from the water authority's privately-owned water from Boca Reservoir," Hauck said.

Hauck says that right now 40% of the water in the Truckee River is coming from Boca Reservoir.

And that's leading TMWA to request help from its water customers. The request is for businesses and residents to cut water use by at least 10%. "Right now focus on your outdoor watering habits. Cut your sprinkler timer from 10 minutes a cycle to nine minutes a cycle," Hauck said.

TMWA says it has planned ahead and has drought reserve water stored in several reservoirs. "We're confident we can meet customer demand this year and well into next year if that should be a dry year, especially with the help of our customers this year," Hauck explained. He says even 10% reduction in water use can make a difference. "Any water that's conserved today is water we can use tomorrow."

# Western governors discuss water use changes



[Jeff DeLong](#), RGJ 9:19 a.m. PDT June 24, 2015



A photo of Washoe Lake taken earlier this month.(Photo: RGJ file)

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Some significant changes may be needed in the way water is used and protected across the West, according to a report issued Tuesday as Nevada and adjoining states struggle with the impacts of protracted drought.

The document, requested last year by Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval, was released at the outset of the annual meeting of the Western Governors' Association at Lake Tahoe. Its release came the same day the Reno area's primary water provider announced it is again tapping emergency water supplies to get through the summer during this fourth year of drought.

Sandoval, chairman of the governors' association, made the western drought the organization's top priority in 2014 and in a statement described the new report as a springboard for future discussions on drought related policy issues.

"Western states will continue to thrive, even with the threat of drought, so long as we work together and make the most of the water we have," Sandoval said.

The report was discussed Tuesday by some involved in its preparation, which involved visits by experts to five states impacted by the current drought, including Nevada and California.

Leo Drozdoff, director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, described drought conditions now affecting the Silver State's rivers and streams as "quite dire."

"In some cases, there's no flow at all," Drozdoff said, adding that successfully addressing the situation here and elsewhere will require a unified approach.

"What not to do is pit one state against the other," Drozdoff said.

During a year of workshops and discussions among experts, a number of common themes and objectives were identified and cited in the report. Among them:

- While extensive data on mountain snowpacks, streamflow and soil moisture is already collected, improved data collection and real-time analysis is needed to better respond to drought and potentially improve predictions of water availability.
- More needs to be done to tap water supplies "once considered marginal," including reused, recycled and brackish water as well as water brought to the surface during oil production. While now feasible due to emerging technology, such steps can be expensive and face regulatory hurdles, the report notes.
- Investment into major water infrastructure must continue, particularly in times of drought, but with federal and state resources increasingly limited, local governments will likely have to shoulder more of the responsibility. Public-private partnerships and long-term local bonds might be ways to make that happen.
- Policy solutions should be explored to allow states greater flexibility to respond quickly to drought conditions, including through such steps as water transfers.
- Drought has significantly increased water conservation and efficiency measures across the West and that trend should continue. The report cited a program undertaken in Park City, Utah that tracks water usage in real time. It allowed water officials to send more than 150 leak alerts to residents, 70 percent of which were addressed within 10 days.
- Better land management practices for forests and farmland may help improve water availability and soil moisture retention. One study cited in the report indicated that runoff in thinned forests could be up to 20 percent higher than in untreated forests.

The Western Governors' Drought Forum is separate but related to the Nevada Drought Forum initiated by Sandoval last spring. The first effort was announced by Sandoval on the shores of a nearly dry Lahontan Reservoir in September. Announcing the second, Sandoval stood on the bed of an empty Washoe Lake.

"There is not a lake there now," Drozdoff said as he briefed others on Nevada's efforts.

Among likely steps, Drozdoff said, are altering rules that have many homeowners associations requiring installation of water-hungry lawns and an increased use of recycled water. Another is removing regulatory barriers that block some needed improvements during times of drought.

"We plan to kick the lid on some of those obstructions," Drozdoff said.

Western states must cooperate to successfully deal with the current drought and droughts of the future, Drozdoff said.

"The challenges throughout the West are definitely unique," Drozdoff said. "So too must be the solutions."

## Area Car Wash Business Spikes During Drought

Posted: Jun 24, 2015 4:00 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Wednesday, June 24, 2015 7:00 PM EDT</em> Updated: Jun 24, 2015 9:48 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Thursday, June 25, 2015 12:48 AM EDT</em>

By Erin Breen

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As our water supply dwindles, area car washes are actually seeing a steady stream of business. In fact, there are lines all over town these days as people wait to drive through car washes. They may cost a few dollars more than washing your car at home, but they are saving on water.

"If you wash a car at home it takes anywhere from 75-100 gallons of water. And that water goes right into the sewer drains," says James Schultz of Jimmy's Car Wash on North McCarran Boulevard in Reno. "If you come to a professional car wash we only use a third of that, 25-30 gallons per car. And while we can't reclaim it all, we do filter and reuse that same water over-and-over again."

That is a draw for those who like convenience and for those who are concerned about cutting water use this summer, like Don Henkes who lives in Lake Tahoe.

"We can't water our lawns, we can't wash off the driveway or wash cars. Heck I only take a shower every other day right now. This is convenient but it also does help," Henkes says.

Mike Hoff of Reno agrees.

"I am a fisherman. The lakes are really low and the river is too. I just bought a house and I plan to xeriscape it, no grass or sprinklers. I've lived here for 20 years and I've never seen it like this," Hoffman said.

Car washes usually see a high flow of business when we have snow. This year the lack of snow and the overall lack of rain is driving business for drought conscious drivers.

## Ask the RGJ: Does adding tree to lawn lower water use?



[Mark Robison](#), RGJ 3:35 p.m. PDT June 24, 2015



Planting a tree in your lawn may help you save water but not until it's big enough to give good shade.(Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

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This week's question is whether a lawn without a tree uses more water than a lawn with a tree.

**Short answer:** Potentially in the long-term. The tree needs to be mature enough to provide shade.

### Full question

My wife asked me to look into whether having a shade tree causes you to use less water on your lawn than a lawn with no shade tree.

### Full response

I reached out to Heidi Kratsch, assistant professor and horticulture specialist at the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. She responded via email:

"There is no easy answer to this question. Theoretically, adding a shade tree to an existing lawn can, in the long term, result in lower water use because of shade provided to the lawn by the tree, and displacement of the high water using lawn with a lower water using tree. But that assumes you remove the turfgrass from beneath the canopy of the tree, and any water savings from the shade the tree provides to the lawn assumes the tree is mature enough to provide shade. So ... the full water savings will not necessarily be immediate.

"We have published data demonstrating that tree-based landscapes use less water than turf-based landscapes. We also know that replacing turfgrass with trees, shrubs or perennials does save water. Another critical thing is that the tree must receive deep watering — so that water penetrates the soil 12 to 18 inches — every week or two in the summer, and organic mulch within the drip line of the tree will help save even more water by preventing evaporation.

"There is no recommended ratio of trees to lawn. Any tree you add to your landscape — assuming it is properly cared for — will help save water in the long term and will provide a cooling benefit to your home, when it gets big enough to provide shade.

"How many trees you can add will depend on the size of your lot because you don't want trees planted so close together that they are competing with one another for water. You also don't want them close enough to the home that they cause damage as they get larger."

### **Join the RGJ Water Savers Club**

We want to help the community save at least 5 million gallons this summer. Sign up for the free RGJ Water Savers Club at [RGJ.com/sierradrought](http://RGJ.com/sierradrought) and we'll help you track your water savings and alert you to great public events this summer to learn more about water.

You can also join the club's group page on Facebook by searching the social media sight for "RGJ Water Savers Club."

And subscribers can get the RGJ's weekly drought and water-savings newsletter by visiting [RGJ.com/newsletters](http://RGJ.com/newsletters). Not a subscriber? It's easy at [RGJ.com/subscribe](http://RGJ.com/subscribe).

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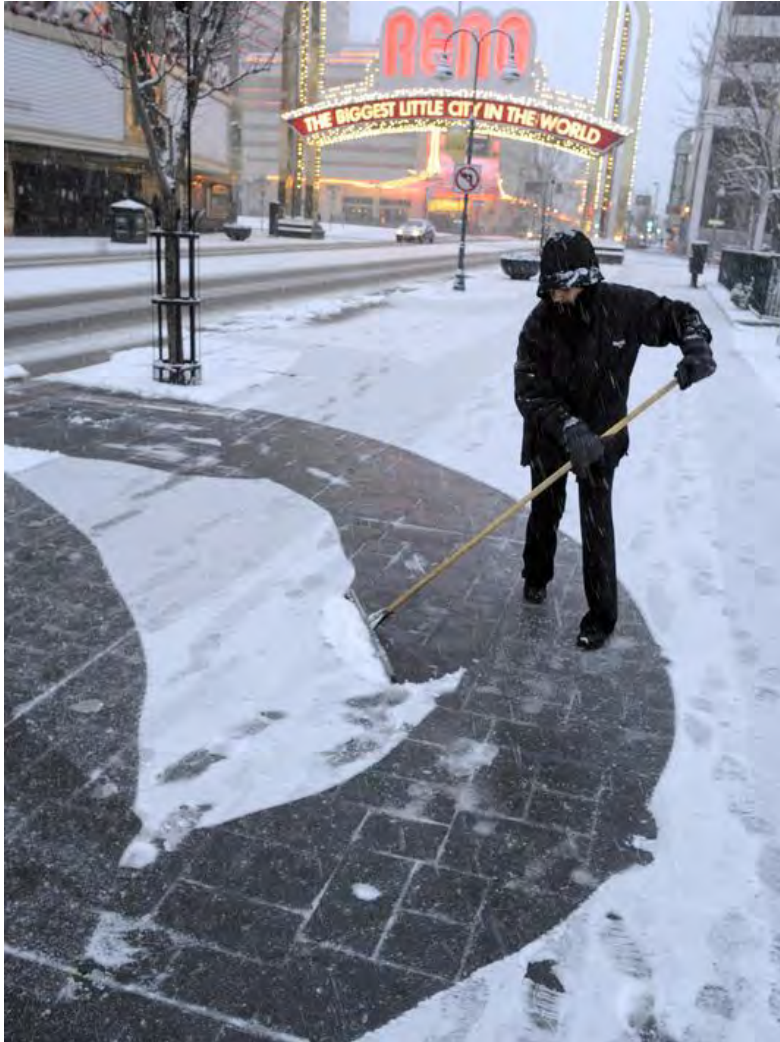
Read or Share this story: <http://on.rgj.com/1Nc92kf>

TOP VIDEOS

## Drought brings a cold, hard (snowless) record to Reno



[Bill O'Driscoll](#), RGJ 10:51 a.m. PDT June 24, 2015



Downtown Reno, January 2010(Photo: RGJ file photo)

1 CONNECT [10 TWEET](#) [1 LINKEDIN](#) 1 COMMENTEMAILMORE

Amid the heat and four years of drought comes this chilling news: Reno is about to break a snowfall record that's stood for 81 years.

More precisely: for the least amount of snow over the 12-month period ending June 30 that encompasses the fall, winter and spring months.

The 2014-15 year ends next Tuesday, and with forecasts of 100-plus-degree days into this weekend, it's all but certain no more snow will fall.

## **Reno winters: the least snowy**

With June's end it's official: The 2014-15 season is the lightest in 116 years of record keeping (excepting 1996-2004 when no records were kept by the National Weather Service). Three years in the last decade are among the lightest.

Sponsored by

Bill O'Driscoll

Tie years: 1970 and 1940; 1977 and 1961; 2007 and 1948

What that means: Since last July 1, National Weather Service records show Reno's total snowfall is just 2.7 inches – fewest since the turn of the 20th century minus the period from 1996-2004 when no official tallies were kept at Reno-Tahoe International Airport.

National Weather Service records at the airport go back to early 1937. Before that, data was taken at downtown Reno locations, including 1933-34, the previous record year for low snowfall with 3.4 inches, according to the "Climate of Reno, Nevada" publication on the National Weather Service Reno office website as well as a 1969 U.S. Department of Commerce climatological summary for Reno.

Those totals contrast with Reno's 116-year average of 22 to 24 inches as well as the all-time snowiest year, 1915-16, with 72.3 inches.

## **Reno winters: the snowiest**

Snow might seem like a distant memory in Northern Nevada's current heat wave and ongoing drought, but records reflect heavy winters in Reno as recently as the 2004-2005 season as shown in the biggest years below.

Bill O'Driscoll

Tie year: 1962 and 1920

Reno's woeful snowfall this past year coincides with the [ongoing four-year drought](#), according to the National Weather Service in Reno.

"Drought. That's the name of the game," said meteorologist Scott McGuire, adding that on average, snowfall has been declining for decades.

"Reno's mean (annual) snowfall is 23.2 inches. Look at 2.7 inches. The number is paltry," he said.

The July-June snowfalls as measured near Reno-Tahoe International Airport since the current drought began after the winter of 2010-11 (with 34 inches of snow) show it:

**2011-12:** 8.8 inches.

**2012-13:** 9.4 inches.

**2013-14:** 6.2 inches.

**2014-15:** 2.7 inches.

The four-year average is 6.7 inches. No other four-year period on record since 1899 is close, climate records show, although the three years from 1938-39 through 1940-41 averaged 6.7 inches but were sandwiched by 38.7 inches of snow in 1937-38 and 32.5 inches in 1941-42.

**Read more about Reno's weather history:**

**<http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/rev/climate/renoclimateupdate>**

# On the prowl for water wasters

- [Video](#)
- [Images](#)

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## [Water wasters and enforcement](#)

Reported by: Terri Hendry  
Email: [thendry@mynews4.com](mailto:thendry@mynews4.com)



[Print Story](#)

Published: 6/25 6:30 pm

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Updated: 6/25 6:58 pm

RENO, Nev. (MyNews4.com & KRNV)- We've heard from a number of you who have questions and concerns about wasting water and enforcement. We went in search of answers and met with "water cop." Here's what we found out. Drew Merrigan is one of 12 Water Conservation Consultants. That's the title of those, like him, who check out reports of violations as well as hit the road looking for water wasters.

Some refer to his position as a "water cop" but before we hit the road we asked TMWA's Andy Gebhardt about the role of these consultants. He said, "We really want to help people. A lot of people don't know what's going on. You and I are sitting here doing this interview and maybe a sprinkler head from your driveway is broken. You don't know because you're here." He explained the "consultants" serve as educators, not necessarily enforcers or punishers.

Merrigan confirms his primary role is that of educator. Of the thousands of calls TMWA gets from residents reporting violations, some of those calls involve watering during the heat of the day. That's a no no. Merrigan explained, "In the heat of the day, water evaporation would occur on the lawn, so we would definitely tell them to stop and let them know they should not be watering at this time." We hadn't been on the road for very long when we found someone doing just that; watering at high noon. As soon as we arrived, the sprinkler stopped but you could see droplets of water serving as evidence. You could also see how quickly the water evaporated in the noon heat from the sidewalk.

After Merrigan served a quick reminder about watering restrictions, we were off again roaming the area, looking for water wasters. I asked him about the perception that he and his colleagues target residential areas far more than businesses. He answered, "I believe that to be false, definitely. We spend a lot of time in the commercial areas and shopping centers, things of that nature." We toured a commercial area but did not find any water wasters while we were out on patrol that day.

We did learn a couple of other things. The most common violation is running water on a street or sidewalk. We also learned despite water restrictions, your kids can still play in the sprinkler. Finally, Gebhardt explained TMWA will work with you to

avoid fines or penalties. Gebhardt said, "We're not into shaming, we're not into being draconian. As long as somebody is aware of the issue and is trying to resolve it, then we are willing to work with them."

To report a water waster [click here](#).

For tips on reducing your water use by 10% [click here](#).

[Print Story](#)

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## Does TMWA Have a Water Conservation Program for Restaurants? Fact-Check Friday

June 26, 2015 By [Bob Conrad](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



After last week's [fact-check column about the Reno Gazette-Journal's water use](#), a reader wrote to ThisisReno asking why TMWA doesn't have a mandatory water conservation program for restaurants.

The short answer is that TMWA does have a program for restaurants, but it is not mandatory, as TMWA's calls for water conservation for all consumers to date have been voluntary.

It's [voluntary](#) for two reasons: 1. past calls for conservation [have been successful](#), and 2. TMWA has reserves for nine years of drought. In short, it's not yet time for mandatory restrictions that are facing parts of California.

TMWA sent in April a letter to restaurants and 25 table tent cards for establishments to use, encouraging consumers to conserve water by requesting water rather than restaurants automatically serving it.

TMWA also notified customers in June about the request to restaurants. Read both the announcement and letter below.

**Do you know of a business that's conserving water?** Please let us know in the comments below.

Get more water conservation tips here: <http://save.tmwa.com/>.

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### Conservation Champions: Our local restaurants

*Businesses are saving, too. In April, TMWA sent out tabletop tent-cards to area restaurants to help promote the conservation message. The cards are being placed on dining tables to raise awareness of*

*responsible water use, as well as help restaurants conserve by not automatically serving water. This also reduces dishwashing.*

*We have received calls, e-mails and Facebook posts from our customers, letting us know about restaurants that are participating. At press time, we know of the following restaurants that are on board: Gold 'N Silver Inn, Miguel's Mexican Restaurant, Atlantis Casino Resort (all restaurants), Los Compadres Fine Mexican Food, BJ's, Nevada Barbeque, Tamarack Junction Casino, Chili's Grill & Bar, Romano's Macaroni*

*Grill, India Kabab & Curry, Si Amigos Mexican Restaurant, PJ & Company, Mariscos El Pescador, Baldini's Sports Casino, Nu Yalk Pizza, 4th Street Bistro, Oxbow Café & Bistro, Uncle Vinny's Pizza, Alderto's Fresh Mexican Food, and Peg's Glorified Ham & Eggs.*

*We know there must be more great restaurants out there displaying the cards. If you see one of our tent cards on a table at your favorite dining place, take out your cell phone camera, snap a picture and post it to our Facebook page.*

*Thanks to the restaurants helping out during the drought. You are all conservation champions!*

-----

**Here is the text of TMWA's April letter:**

*Dear Restaurant Manager,*

*As you are likely aware, the Truckee Meadows is currently experiencing its fourth consecutive year of drought. This summer we will be utilizing drought reserves held in upstream reservoirs in order to meet our customer's water needs. Although our community has the ability to manage water supplies through nine years of drought, identifying ways to save water now simply makes good sense.*

*This is why Truckee Meadows Water Authority is distributing water conservation tabletop tent-cards to area restaurants to help promote the conservation message. Enclosed are 25 tabletop tent-cards for use in your restaurant. The cards were designed to remind residents and visitors that we all need to pitch in and conserve.*

*All restaurants will receive 25 per location. However, we will deliver more, at no cost, if you need them. Please call TMWA's Conservation line at 775-834-8005 and leave a message, including your name, restaurant address, how many more cards you need and your phone number. We will have them delivered to you within five (5) working days. You may also email your request to: [conservation@tmwa.com](mailto:conservation@tmwa.com).*

*In addition to helping reduce water use, we hope that the table tent-cards save you time and money on dishwashing and inventory management, and bring more efficiency to your food service staff.*

*Please keep in mind that your participation in this program is extremely important to help save water, raise awareness of responsible water use, and help this area save water should we need it for next year. Enclosed is a list of Drought Frequently Asked Questions, for your information.*

# Our view: End flat-rate water plans

The Opinion of the RGJ Editorial Board 9:52 a.m. PDT June 29, 2015



Thanks to May rains and snowmelt, water from Lake Tahoe trickles over the rim last month and into the Truckee River just above the dam at Tahoe City, Calif.(Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)

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Flat-rate water plans needs to end now in Reno-Sparks.

Unfortunately, this cannot happen until October because of a bad decision by the Truckee Meadows Water Authority board of directors.

The decision was bad because flat-rate use harms the community, the board's reasoning for delaying full conversion to meters was flawed and it demonstrates a lack of seriousness about the drought.

If common sense had been followed, TMWA customers would already be converted to meters.

- Metered rate plans give people a financial incentive to use less water by charging them more for higher consumption.

- Flat-rate water customers have no financial incentive to cut back on water so they, unsurprisingly, use more.
- Encouraging lower water consumption is vital to the community's survival because we live in a desert.
- Therefore switching to meters is in the community's best interest.

The board's decision was even more of a scandal because it knew the region was in the fourth year of an exceptionally dry drought.

### **Flat-rate excess**

Flat-rate usage has proven to be a problem.

Last year, flat-rate residential customers made up about 7 percent of residential customers, yet they used 20 percent of water used by all residential customers. This is according to investigative reporting by RGJ environmental reporter Jeff DeLong and data analysis by RGJ watchdog editor Brian Duggan.

The average metered home used 121,000 gallons in 2014 while the average flat-rate home used 281,000 gallons. Of the top 10 residential water users, nine are on flat-rate plans.

Far and away the biggest residential user is a private golf course that used 11 million gallons in 2014. The course is on a flat rate so the water keeping it green costs a fraction of what metered customers pay. Most outrageous is that the golf course isn't even used. Switching to a metered plan would likely inspire far less water to be used there.

### **How we got here**

Switching has been a long time coming. A regional water agreement in 1990 — in the middle of the previous major drought, that one lasting eight years — formalized that water utility customers eventually would get meters and be charged based on how much they use.

In 2001, TMWA decided that accelerating conversion from flat rate to meter was in the community's best interest. In 2007, the TMWA board decided to require meter conversion by January 2010.

This deadline apparently became a recession victim and was set aside. In December, TMWA staff was finally directed to pursue a timeline for implementing full conversion by June 1.

And then — by a unanimous vote, no less — the TMWA board delayed the conversion again. Board members are:

- Sparks mayor Geno Martini and Sparks councilman Ron Smith

- Reno councilwomen Neoma Jardon, Jenny Brekhus and Naomi Duerr
- Washoe County commissioners Vaughn Hartung and Jeanne Herman

Their decision was inexplicable. The arguments given were that some customers would be harmed by increased bills and the flat-rate users would get another season to prepare their landscaping for less water.

But this switch is not being sprung on anyone. The board's arguments have been known for 25 years. People have had time to prepare. Making the change four months earlier would have relatively minor effects on individual customers but would have conserved millions of gallons of water and likely decreased the tapping of drought reserves, which started just this week.

TMWA's board put the financial needs of a small but vocal subset of residents — and the needs of those residents' landscaping — above those of the overall community.

As mentioned, moving up the switch date is no longer possible, even though water reports keep getting more calamitous. The Truckee River's flow historically is 924 cubic feet per second at this time of year at Mogul. On Thursday, it was 4.5 cubic feet.

This brings up two more reasons the TMWA board's decision was so unwise: Summer has the highest water usage and it is a season when supplies are not being replenished. Now would have been a better time than October for full conversion.

To change from flat-rate to meters now would require a public workshop notice be put in the next TMWA bill, the plan's first reading at the following monthly board meeting and then a second reading the next month. By then, it would be September and the metered conversion would start in October anyway.

Unless an enterprising soul uncovers a heretofore unknown rule allowing an immediate temporary change to metered usage, it wouldn't matter if every board member recanted their votes.

Other Nevada government bodies must not repeat the TMWA board's mistakes. Our natural desert environment and the current drought's seriousness make it imperative that special interests should not drive water decisions affecting the entire community.

## **Nevada, Western states challenge new federal water rules**

*Posted: Jun 29, 2015 2:40 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Monday, June 29, 2015 5:40 PM EDT</em>Updated: Jun 29, 2015 2:40 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Monday, June 29, 2015 5:40 PM EDT</em>*

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) - Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt is joining 12 other states in pressing a lawsuit against new federal agency rules that could expand powers over state and local water sources.

Laxalt announced on Monday that Nevada is joining several other Western states in filing a lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The suit claims that the new rule would grant federal agencies authority over small ponds, generally dry small streams and irrigation ditches. Laxalt said in a statement that the complaint was in response to "unreasonable federal overreach."

Gov. Brian Sandoval said in a statement that he authorized Laxalt to join the suit after finding the rule ignored requests made by state-level water authorities.

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# Groundwater key resource this summer of drought



[Jeff DeLong](#), RGJ 8:07 a.m. PDT June 29, 2015



Drought conditions have the Truckee River, normally the Reno area's most important water supply, barely flowing. This summer, water pumped from below the ground will provide a critical fraction of water supplies.(Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ file)

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With the Truckee River flowing at a trickle, water pumped from beneath the ground will prove critical to getting the Reno area through a summer of drought.

More than at any time in at least 20 years, groundwater will play an important role in providing water for drinking, showering and watering lawns — up to 30 percent of overall supply, according to the Truckee Meadows Water Authority. During a normal year, groundwater provides only about 10 percent of the area's water supplies.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

RGJ Investigates: We're using more water today than in 2011

RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL

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"It's going to make up a much larger piece of the pie," said Bill Hauck, the water authority's senior hydrologist.

The drought is now four years long, with the past winter the driest yet. Lake Tahoe dropped below its natural rim last October, cutting off flow into the Truckee River, which normally provides almost all of the water used in Reno-Sparks. Last week, the authority announced it had begun tapping emergency water supplies stored in upstream reservoirs to help meet summer water demand.

Groundwater pumped from 80-plus production wells will provide the balance, allowing the utility to avoid using as little of its drought reserves as possible so they can be tapped again next year if the drought continues.

"With the limited Truckee River water, our wells basically become the baseload. We're basically pumping all we can," Hauck said. "We don't know what's going to happen next year, so we're trying to minimize use of those reserves."

The Western drought is forcing many communities to increasingly rely on water pumped from the ground, with two steps now being undertaken in Southern California to boost supplies. A water district in Orange County is adding more purified wastewater to its groundwater basin, where it is later pumped out as drinking water for 2.4 million residents, to help deal with the drought.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, meanwhile, announced plans to capture stormwater runoff that normally drains into the sea and use it to recharge the groundwater aquifer. The goal is to collect more than 200,000 acre-feet of rainwater each year by 2035 to refill underground supplies.

In Reno, the water authority prepared for its groundwater needs last fall and winter when the river was flowing at sufficient levels to provide supplies and demand for water was at its lowest. More Truckee River water than ever before — more than 1.2 billion gallons — was pumped into aquifers to boost groundwater supplies for use this summer.

"That's more than we have ever recharged before," Hauck said. "That's why we got such a large jump on it early this fall."

Expanded use of groundwater wells is not happening everywhere. In the Mount Rose fan area, where the utility took over water operations from Washoe County Jan. 1, wells are being pumped no more than they normally would. That area has experienced a long history of problems involving a declining aquifer and drying wells. The utility's five production wells in the Truckee Meadows treated for solvent contamination are also being operated as normal, Hauck said.

After the next wet season allows a switchover back to water drawn from the river, utility experts will study aquifers to determine if expanded pumping operations over the summer lowered groundwater levels to any degree of concern. If they have, those areas will be targeted for additional recharge next winter, Hauck said.

"If there are negative impacts, those are the areas we target next year," Hauck said. "It will be more of a tactical approach and hit some areas harder than others.

"We're going to recharge at least as much (as last winter) and I would be surprised if we don't do more."

## How Bears are Dealing with the Drought

Posted: Jun 29, 2015 10:44 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, June 30, 2015 1:44 AM EDT</em> Updated: Jun 29, 2015 10:44 PM PDT <em class="wnDate">Tuesday, June 30, 2015 1:44 AM EDT</em>

By Ryan Canaday

[Email](#)

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[producers@ktvn.com](mailto:producers@ktvn.com)



The Nevada drought is leading bears closer to roads, potentially leaving deadly consequences.

On Sunday, a young black bear was hit and killed on I-80 westbound near Verdi.

The Nevada Department of Wildlife says when bears have to wander further for food and water because of the drought; they are more likely to cross highways. Chris Healy with NDOW says this can be dangerous for not only vehicles but for the bears as well.

“Auto versus bear is actually the most common mortality for black bears in Nevada, since the late 1990's. We've had 193 bears hit and killed by cars,” says Healy.

Healy says bears hit by cars occur even more frequently during drought years and during periods of high temperatures.

In 2007, when the area was experiencing very hot weather, 35 bears were hit and killed by cars. This is the most vehicle related bear deaths documented in a single year.

Healy says with food and water in short supply, drivers should expect the animals to be moving closer toward sources of water. For the most part though, he says to be on the lookout when the roads get dark.

“We're reminding people that black bears are out on the dark roads at night, so be careful because not only black bears but mule deer and other such animals that cross the highways at night time, especially during the summer heat,” says Healy.

July has also been proclaimed by the state of Nevada as bear logic month. People are being asked to be more aware of bears and their natural habits

# California lawmakers to hold hearing on pot farm water use

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SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) -- A state legislative committee will look at the impact of the drought and water use by illegal marijuana cultivators on North Coast fisheries at a hearing in Sacramento.

The Santa Rosa Press Democrat reports (<http://bit.ly/1g5mYIB> ) that the hearing on Wednesday follows reports that pot plants are consuming billions of gallons of water and salmon-rearing creeks are running dry.

The Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture says rogue marijuana crops on the North Coast are damaging fisheries.

More than 86,500 marijuana plants were seized last week in the remote Island Mountain region where Mendocino, Humboldt and Trinity counties meet. Officials say they found environmental issues including unlawful grading and creeks that had been dammed and diverted to provide water for the pot plants.

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Information from: The Santa Rosa Press Democrat, <http://www.pressdemocrat.com>

AP-WF-06-30-15 1146GMT

## Special events this summer for RGJ Water Savers Club

[Mark Robison, RGJ](#) 4:19 p.m. PDT June 30, 2015



The RGJ Water Savers Club's bus tour will stop at TMWA's hydroelectric plant on the Truckee River in Verdi. (Photo: Provided by TMWA)

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Get inspired to save water this summer with RGJ events. All but one are free. More are coming so check back at [RGJ.com/sierradrought](http://RGJ.com/sierradrought).

- **July 11:** Water-saving landscape sessions will feature 15-minute presentations followed by 15-minute question-and-answer periods at the Moana Nursery Landscape & Design Center, 1190 W. Moana Lane. Sessions will start at 10 a.m. with "Top Irrigation Water Wasters" by Scott Gescheider, general manager of landscape services; then 11 a.m. with "Water-wise Shade Trees for the High Desert" by horticulturist Jon Bruyn; 1 p.m. with "Water-wise Plants & Shrubs for the High Desert" by horticulturist Lisa Braginton; and 2 p.m. with "Water Saving Benefits of Amending & Mulching Soil" by horticulturist Steve Packer. Cost: Free.

- **July 11:** Drought-tolerant plant walking tour for Girl Scouts (and their parents/guardians) with horticulturist Jon Bruyn at 1 p.m. at Moana Nursery, 1100 W. Moana Lane. Cost: Free but the

event is limited to 20 girls plus their parents so please RSVP at [tickets.rgj.com](http://tickets.rgj.com). The ticket will entitle each Girl Scout to a 30% discount on one full-priced water-wise perennial or shrub purchased that day.

- **July 25:** A special insiders' bus tour of where Reno's water comes from. Featuring expert commentary, this five-hour trip departs at 9 a.m. from the Discovery Museum. First stop is Fanny Bridge in Tahoe City. The tour includes facility tours of the Verdi hydroelectric plant and Reno's Chalk Bluff water treatment plant, plus viewings of Boca Reservoir and Donner Lake. Cost: \$30 a person for those whose families are RGJ subscribers, \$50 a person for non-subscribers; \$5 off if purchasing two tickets. Tickets available soon at [tickets.rgj.com](http://tickets.rgj.com). Space is limited to 46 people. (Bus tour participants can get admission to the Discovery Museum that afternoon for half-price on July 25 by showing your bus ticket. The museum features an interactive replica of the Truckee River system and will be hosting the popular "Inside Out" anatomy exhibit.)

- **July 30:** Behind-the-scenes tour of the Peppermill's high-tech water-saving solutions at 5:30 p.m. The 45- to 60-minute tour will feature looks at the resort-spa-casino's geothermal heating and cooling system using water, wind-monitors on fountains, AstroTurf, greywater laundry, and water-saving showerheads and toilets in the rooms. Limit of 20 participants; reservation tickets available soon at [tickets.rgj.com](http://tickets.rgj.com). Cost: Free.

- **Sept. 15:** Truckee River ecosystem and Wonders of Water event from 6 to 8 p.m. at McKinley Arts & Culture Center. Learn about the uniqueness of the Truckee River as the only closed-lake system in the United States. Kids and parents will then learn creative ways to save water with the Girl Scouts' Wonders of Water activities. Limit of 150 people; reservation tickets available soon at [tickets.rgj.com](http://tickets.rgj.com). Cost: Free.

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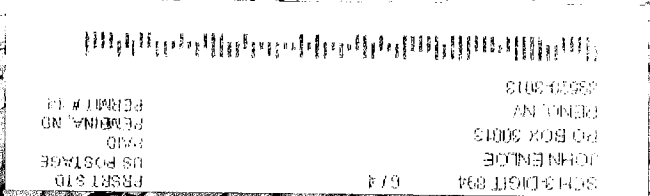
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# Water SPOT

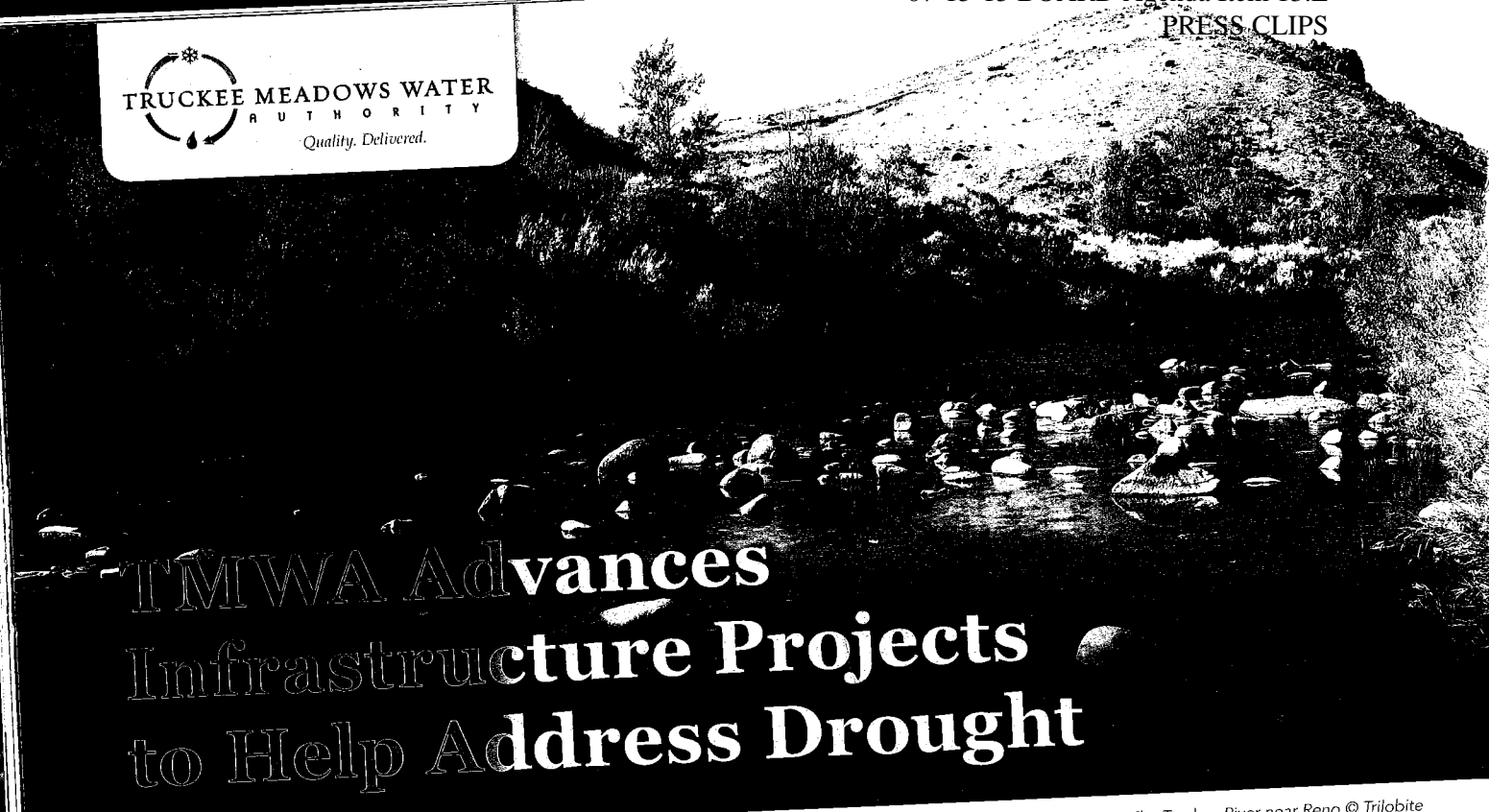
## TMWA Advances Infrastructure Projects to Help Address Drought

Nevada Water Environment Association  
8500 Clean Water Way  
Reno, NV 89502  
Address service requested



*Inside this issue:*

The Stormwater Manager's Challenge • Water Week 2015 WEF Fly-In • 2015 NWEA Annual Conference Highlights



# TMWA Advances Infrastructure Projects to Help Address Drought

The Truckee River near Reno © Trilobite

By Scott Estes and Paul Miller

In response to the ongoing drought and whatever Mother Nature may have in store for the future, Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) is working on two significant water distribution system projects in the North Valleys and Arrowcreek/Mt. Rose areas, as well as expanding their Aquifer Recharge Program.

According to Scott Estes, TMWA's director of systems planning and engineering, the North Valleys Integration project involves construction of about 29,000 feet of 24-inch pipe on Lemmon Drive. This will allow 100 percent of the Fish Springs groundwater supply (currently 6,500 gallons per minute up to 8,000 acre-feet per year) to be available for use within the North Valleys areas. This groundwater supply can offset an equal amount of surface water from the Truckee River that is currently pumped up from the Truckee Meadows to the North Valley areas. This conjunctive management will help TMWA conserve additional upstream drought reserves, should the drought continue in to 2016. The \$17.8 million project is currently under design with construction scheduled to begin sometime in the late summer or fall of 2015 with an in-service date of June 1, 2016.

TMWA is also planning to construct water-system improvements to deliver up to 1,500 gallons per minute of off-peak water supply to allow existing groundwater wells in the Arrowcreek and ultimately

the Mt. Rose water systems to rest during the winter months. These areas currently rely on groundwater wells for 100 percent of their water supply and the continuing drought situation has severely limited the amount of natural recharge to the local aquifers. Phase 1 of the proposed improvements consist of about 3,600 feet of 10-inch pipe on Zolezzi Lane along with two new booster pump stations to get the water up into the Arrowcreek system where it can be distributed to several areas. The \$2.8 million project is scheduled for construction in the summer of 2015 with a planned in-service date in November 2015 to allow passive recharge throughout the off-peak water season. Phase 2 of the project, to be constructed in 2016-2017, consists of an additional \$1.2 million of improvements to deliver some of the off-peak supply up into the Mt. Rose/Galena water system to provide a source for passive aquifer recharge in those areas.

TMWA has also been expanding the Aquifer Storage and Recovery Program (ASR). Groundwater supplies are enhanced and protected when TMWA pumps approximately eight million gallons a day of treated surface water per day through its wells into the aquifer for future drought use. This storage is in addition to the upstream drought reserves stored in reservoirs. The process occurs when water use in the community drops to

one-fourth of the peak summer average usage and surface water is available in the winter and spring. The stored water can then be accessed during drought periods. According to Paul Miller, TMWA's manager of operations and water quality, TMWA lets ground water wells rest in the off-season and maximizes the use of surface water from the Truckee River.

Since the start of winter, TMWA has been reviewing all possible well sites in the TMWA system, which includes wells acquired through the recent consolidation with Washoe County's water utility. TMWA has currently identified over a dozen additional well sites that can be set up for recharge; and is working as quickly as possible to test, design, construct and implement recharge in those wells. "The more water we can store this time of year, the better. It's like money in the bank," Miller said.

ASR was established by TMWA to improve water quality and augment water resources. The program and the projects described above are also part of one of the primary goals of consolidation: to improve the management of the area's water resources through conjunctive use – minimizing groundwater pumping and maximizing use of surface water when it is available. Many other efforts are also underway to improve infrastructure and service to customers. ♪

# Head groundskeeper monitoring water usage during drought



[1 image](#)

Reno Aces groundskeeper Eric Blanton rakes the infield at Aces Ballpark.

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Sports Reporter | Posted 2 days ago

The multi-year drought throughout the region is causing obvious problems.

Last year, the Truckee River was the lowest it's been in 20 years. It's certainly not going to be any more full this summer. This year, the snowpack in the Sierra was anywhere from 0 to 19 percent below average throughout the winter into the spring. Reservoirs are starting to look like bathtubs with the drain left open.

While the lack of snow and rain in the region is apparent (especially for those who had illusions to float the Truckee River this summer) other spots show no such problems. Aces Ballpark is one of them. It remains one of the nicer playing surfaces in the Pacific Coast League.

"I feel it's right at the top. I always get good comments," said Aces seventh-year head groundskeeper Eric Blanton. "With the baseball players and baseball teams, no news is good news. So if I don't hear anything bad, I take that as it's playing well."

That's not to say Blanton, who has been a groundskeeper for 15 years, including a three-year stint as a crew member for the Los Angeles Dodgers, is keeping the grass lush with reckless abandon. He is more than aware of the absence of water in the region.

Blanton has never dealt with water restrictions, but he's already acting accordingly. Instead of watering the field every other night, Blanton starting watering the surface every third night this spring.

“Obviously with where we are out with the drought and everything, we try to get ahead of the game and cut back as much as I can before any restrictions happen,” Blanton said. “One, so we can do our part. And two, see how much we can cut back at once.

“We were able to cut down 2-3 waterings a week for a few months. That adds up.”

Despite the cutbacks, which include watering the infield and warning track less for dust prevention, Blanton said he is not noticing any drawbacks on the playing surface. Then again, the Aces’ June schedule has been generous—for him at least. Reno’s home schedule in June had only 12 games.

“Yeah it makes it easier. Obviously when the grass is just sitting there just resting, it’s good for the grass,” Blanton said. “The problem with a light month, you have a heavy month somewhere.”

July is that heavy month. The Aces will play 20 of 28 games at their own park with homestands of nine and 11 games. But it’s not a disaster for Blanton. The grass is never stronger than it is in the middle of the summer.

“The good thing about that is June, July and August, the warm summer months, the grass is at its peak. With the seeding and stuff we do, it’s at its peak time so it’s able to withstand the wear in the summer months,” Blanton said. “If we’re going to have a busy month, I’d rather it be in June or July than April.”

Nathan has covered local sports for The Daily Sparks Tribune since September 2013. Follow him on Twitter: @Trib\_Shoup.

# Letter: TMWA board may be breaking the law

7:41 a.m. PDT July 2, 2015



Letter to the Editor(Photo: RGJ)

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TMWA's decision to [delay until October 1 metered water rates](#) for some customers may be in violation of federal law, thus precluding its rightful and current use of drought storage reserves.

According to the Truckee River Operating Agreement signed into federal law in 2008, "Water saved through meter retrofit would be reserved for dry water years as Credit Water." Meter retrofit has taken place but metered billing is not yet required for previously unmetered customers.

Procrastination by the TMWA board to uniformly implement metered water rates for these customers demonstrates bad faith in fulfilling the intention and substance of the law. TMWA's failure could leave itself open to legal challenges by other signatories to the agreement including the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe.

Because we are in a severe drought requiring the use of drought storage reserves, the TMWA board should immediately impose metered rate billing for all customers to enhance water savings and fulfill the meter retrofit condition of the law.

*Charles E. Fletcher, Reno*

# Letter: Flat-rate flap shows lack of water leadership

7:38 a.m. PDT July 2, 2015

Letter to the Editor(Photo: RGJ)

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This water metering issue is beyond simple comprehension [ "[Despite high water use, flat-rate billing here until fall](#)," News, June 23]. The TMWA board is clearly in over their collective heads to allow unmetered billing to continue.

What should be asked is why this has not been remedied three or four years ago. What pressing issues have these folks been dealing with?

This is another example of public officials completely ignoring strategic issues and focusing on monthly nonsense. This issue does not require debate, it requires leadership and action - two qualities, unfortunately, not found on the TMWA Board.

*John Listinsky, Reno*

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## Op-ed: Save at least 10 percent — it really matters

Mark Foree 11:03 a.m. PDT July 2, 2015



Mark Foree(Photo: RGJ file)

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As you are all aware, we are in our fourth year of drought here in the Truckee Meadows. In fact, last year was the driest winter in over 100 years. Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) has planned for this situation and is well prepared to meet the water needs of our customers again this summer. However, as the drought persists, the community's help in conserving water is more important than ever.

Very low Truckee River flows are obvious right now. In a normal year, the Truckee River supplies 85 percent of our community's drinking water. TMWA has planned for decreased river flows and we are now releasing water from our drought storage reservoirs to meet customer demands. We have also turned to our production wells to help meet customer demands. This means that every drop of water saved now — at home and at work — can be held back and stored for next year, should we have another dry winter.



Buy Photo

The Truckee River barely covers the rocks in its bed as it flows toward downtown Reno on June 17. (Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)

TMWA is asking for at least a 10 percent reduction in water use — both indoors and outdoors — from all of our customers, including homes, businesses, homeowners' associations and apartment complexes. Taking this a step further, we are also extending our conservation request to our community's private well owners. Although these well owners are not TMWA customers, we all use the same water resources and need to work together in our conservation efforts. Remember: any water we save, both upstream and underground, will help all of us.

[RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL](#)

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In May, TMWA's water production was 19 percent lower compared to May 2013 (the most recent year that conservation was not requested). That means our customers saved over 1,500 acre feet of water, or approximately a half a billion gallons. Thank you to those who turned off your sprinklers while it was raining. We believe strongly that everyone can find a way to save at least 10 percent. If you're not sure where to start, visit [tmwa.com/save](http://tmwa.com/save) to learn 10 easy ways to save 10 percent. Our planning and projections show a 10 percent reduction in water use will allow TMWA to retain 5,000 acre feet of water in upstream drought reserves. That's over 1.6

billion gallons of water. This will help us maintain sufficient reserves for next year, should the drought continue.

Our community has been through these challenges before. Drought is a natural occurrence in the high desert and we are well-prepared. The Truckee Meadows region is very fortunate to have substantial community-owned drought reserves in Donner and Independence lakes, as well as Boca and Stampede reservoirs. These reserves are only used when our community needs them — in times of drought. We also have a long-established aquifer storage and recovery program through which treated surface water is recharged into the underground aquifer in the winter and spring months. This past season we recharged as much as 10 million gallons per day and have stored a total of 3,750 acre-feet, or 1.2 billion gallons, in the underground aquifer. TMWA will continue its three-day-a-week watering schedule, which has been proven to use less water than twice-a-week watering. If you see water being wasted, please let us know by calling our conservation department at 834-8005 or using the online form: [www.tmwa.com/waste](http://www.tmwa.com/waste). If you would like a water audit to help you determine how best to save water at your home or business, please call 834-8080.

As a community-owned water system with a staff that lives and works here, we share a strong sense of commitment to the quality and availability of our water resources. We know that our customers share that same commitment. In fact, total water use by our customers in 2014 was 12 percent less than in 2001, the year TMWA was formed. We really are all in this together. Our community has always been diligent about conservation and we encourage everyone to keep up the good work.

*Mark Foree is the general manager of TMWA. TMWA is a not-for-profit water utility, overseen by elected officials from Reno, Sparks and Washoe County. TMWA employs a highly skilled team who ensure the treatment, delivery and availability of high-quality drinking water around the clock for more than 385,000 residents of the Truckee Meadows.*

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# Free water-wise landscaping sessions Saturday in Reno

[Mark Robison, RGJ](#) 6:16 a.m. PDT July 6, 2015



Indian Magic Crabapple trees are available at Moana Nursery.(Photo: Handout)

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Free water-saving landscape sessions will be Saturday July 11 at Moana Nursery Landscape & Design Center as part of the RGJ Water Savers Club summer events.

There will be 15-minute presentations at the top of the hour followed by 15-minute question-and-answer periods at 1190 W. Moana Lane, across the parking lot from the main nursery. They are:

- 10 a.m.** with “Top Irrigation Water Wasters” by Scott Gescheider, general manager of landscape services
- 11 a.m.** with “Water-wise Shade Trees for the High Desert” by horticulturist Jon Bruyn
- 1 p.m.** with “Water-wise Plants & Shrubs for the High Desert” by horticulturist Lisa Braginton
- 2 p.m.** with “Water Saving Benefits of Amending & Mulching Soil” by horticulturist Steve Packer.

Just show up at each session that sounds interesting to you. No need to RSVP. Details: 825-0602 (Moana Nursery Landscape & Design Center) or 788-6420 (RGJ engagement editor Mark Robison).

•**Bonus event for Girl Scouts:** Also on Saturday July 11 will be a free drought-tolerant plant walking tour for Girl Scouts (and their parents/guardians) with horticulturist Jon Bruyn at 1 p.m. at Moana Nursery, 1100 W. Moana Lane. Recommended grade range kindergarten through 5th. The event is limited to 20 girls plus their parents or troop leaders so please RSVP at [tickets.rgj.com](http://tickets.rgj.com). The free ticket will entitle each Girl Scout to a 30% discount on one full-priced water-wise perennial or shrub purchased that day.

Learn about more RGJ Water Savers Club events at [RGJ.com/sierradrought](http://RGJ.com/sierradrought)

# County reignites growth battle with cities



[Anjeanette Damon](#), RGJ 7:32 a.m. PDT July 6, 2015



The Rancharra property in Reno(Photo: RGJ file)

## Story Highlights

- The county is withholding funds for regional planning in an effort to gain more power on the board.
- County commissioners argue Reno and Sparks have too much power to kill projects in the county.
- City officials say the regional planning agency is critical for avoiding uncontrolled growth.
- Developers say regional planning has become a forum for political retribution among the governments.

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In a surprise move last month, the Washoe County Commission voted to withhold its legally required payment to the regional agency that oversees growth and development, igniting the latest front in the increasingly volatile fight among county and city elected officials.

Flouting both state law and an inter-local agreement the county signed in 1990, the commission voted 3-2 to withhold the \$205,000 it owes to help run the Truckee Meadows Regional Planning Agency — a cost that is shared among Washoe County, Reno and Sparks.

The commissioners supporting the move to defund the agency complain the two cities can block developments in the unincorporated county because of the governing board's voting structure.

The board includes three county commissioners, three Sparks officials and four Reno officials. It approves major projects of "regional significance," such as the massive housing development planned for Rancharra in south Reno.

Commissioners also complained the board has become a forum for unrelated political disputes, trapping developers in squabbles among governments that have nothing to do with their specific projects.

"If one of the cities is upset with the county about another issue, they can easily stop a project not based upon the merits of the project, but because they feel they were wronged," said Commissioner Bob Lucey, who led the effort on the commission to withhold the funding.

### **Tipping balance of power**



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Commissioner Bob Lucey is leading the county's effort to expand its power on the Regional Planning Governing Board. (Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)

Their goal is to use the money as leverage to increase the county's voting power on the board.

"The county is (not) just an entity that is here to service two cities," Commission Chairwoman Marsha Berkbigler said. "It is our responsibility to make sure that we grow the business of this county. We can't do that under the current structure."

They said the commission would reconsider the funding after a discussion can be had on how to increase the county's power on the governing board — or whether to take away the board's authority to approve projects and make the agency simply an advisory body.

Commissioners Vaughn Hartung and Jeanne Herman opposed the move.

City leaders from Reno and Sparks dispute that the board has rejected projects for political reasons, noting projects are evaluated on a uniform set of criteria.

According to a Reno Gazette-Journal review of projects that required approval from the agency over the last year, only one county project was rejected: A 360-unit apartment complex sought by a politically connected developer that had generated significant community opposition in Spanish Springs.

"How many projects have we turned down that they couldn't do?" a frustrated Sparks Mayor Geno Martini said. "This is a one-issue thing."

"They think people who own land in the county should be able to do whatever they want with it and that's uncontrolled growth. In the times we are in, with the drought and everything, do we want uncontrolled growth in this valley?"



Sparks Mayor Geno Martini opposes the county's effort to defund the regional planning agency. (Photo: Andy Barron/RGJ File)

### **Salvo in an ongoing conflict**

The fight comes amid a series of disputes between Reno and Washoe County. The most pressing is a tug-of-war over how to provide fire protection services to the region.

City leaders argue urban-type developments in the unincorporated county could stress the city fire department, which is now legally required to respond to fires that are closest to its stations regardless of jurisdiction.

The Regional Planning Agency was born of regional strife in 1989. The late Sen. Bill Raggio co-authored legislation that created the joint body to determine how the region should grow after both the city and the county began building expensive sewage lines in the same area.

In its 15-year existence, it has been a consistent source of infighting and lawsuits as the various jurisdictions compete for projects and established zoning regimes.

The resulting regional plan, which is revised every five years, is written to encourage developments with urban densities, such as small-lot single family homes, apartment complexes, industrial parks and office space within city limits — where they can be more efficiently covered by municipal services and where higher property taxes are charged to cover such services.

That can make it more difficult for developers to win approval for some projects in the unincorporated county jurisdiction.

Over the years, however, both the cities and the county have pursued so-called "leap frog" development on the outskirts of the community.

Under the agreement signed in 1990, Washoe County is responsible for funding about a third of the agency's budget. Sparks also funds a third and Reno funds 40 percent.

### **Escalating tensions**

The governing board will meet later this month to determine how to react to the potential loss of funding.

Martini said he would favor the agency filing a lawsuit against the county to compel it to provide the funding.

"They tried to stop funding several years ago and they found out it was not legal," Martini said. "It's not any more legal now than it was then."



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Reno council member Jenny Brekhuis is the chairwoman of the Regional Planning Governing Board. (Photo: Andy Barron/RGJ)

Councilwoman Jenny Brekhus described the county's move as an "escalation of the broader regional conflict that we see."

"This is about growth and what form it should take and what form is not appropriate to go into the unincorporated county," she said.

Residents and businesses in the unincorporated county pay a lower property tax rate than city dwellers.

"If growth occurs in the unincorporated areas, that means less money to local governments to provide service on a long-term basis," Brekhus said, arguing the regional agency is key to preventing urban sprawl.

Berkbigler disputed the contention that the commission has declared war on regional planning.

"This is not trying to blow regional up," Berkbigler said. "This is not trying to get rid of regional."

Berkbigler said simply raising the county's concerns with the board hasn't achieved any results.

"I have found the best way to get someone's attention is to go to where the money is. We have some issues we want clarified, and once they are clarified we will pay the money."



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Commissioner Marsha Berkgigler supports the effort by the county to wrangle more power over regional planning. (Photo: Jason Bean/RGJ)

Berkgigler accused the agency of treating proposed developments differently based on the jurisdiction.

As an example, she used the 360-unit Village at the Peak apartment complex proposed by developer Jim House, which was rejected by the county planning commission, the regional planning commission and the governing board.

Only the Washoe County Commission voted to approve the project.

House has contributed heavily to county commissioner campaigns, making nearly \$35,000 in local political donations since 2007, according to campaign finance records. He also held a fundraiser at his home for Berkgigler.

He has since pulled his application for the project, determining he has a better use for the Spanish Springs property.

Berkgigler compared that to the proposed Rancharra development, which goes before the Regional Planning Commission later this month.

She said the same concerns over traffic, sewer and school overcrowding that were raised over House's project aren't being raised over Rancharra. She predicted the project will pass regional muster.

Regional planning director Kimberly Robinson said the same set of factors used to determine whether House's project conformed with the regional plan will be applied to the Rancharra project.

House could not be reached for comment, but his lobbyist, Garrett Gordon, said the conflict over regional planning is not related to House's project.

Gordon, who has represented developers with major projects in all three jurisdictions, said the conflict is a result of a new set of elected officials hoping to take a "fresh look" at regional issues.

Gordon led a short-lived effort at the Legislature this year to convert the governing board to an advisory board similar to what is used in Clark County.

"Henderson can't tell Clark County what to do and Clark County can't tell Las Vegas what to do," he said. "But certainly on larger projects, they get together and discuss it and how a project in one jurisdiction can impact another."

### **Playing political chess**

City officials argue that major developments approved by the county stress city resources and infrastructure without generating the city tax revenue needed to provide the services.

"I'm tired of the county trying to shove stuff out on the Pyramid Highway with the mess it already is," Martini said, noting frequent traffic jams and congestion on the roadway that links north Sparks to the center of town.

Commissioner Kitty Jung, who supported withholding the funding, said the region as a whole has too many "fiefdoms."

"There are too many silos in the community collecting too many tax dollars with executive directors making over six figures," she said, listing the Regional Transportation Commission, the Truckee Meadows Water Authority and the Regional Planning Agency. "These are all little fiefdoms that are good for the one and terrible for the many."

Developer Jesse Haw, who has built commercial, industrial and residential developments in Spanish Springs over the past 35 years, said the regional planning governing board has become a forum for elected officials to exact political retribution on one another.

"Certain projects get caught up between the county and the city and are hung up based on stuff that really has nothing to do with what your project is about," Haw said. "Regional planning is still a good idea if we have the leadership to talk about regional ideas and solutions and not use it as a political arena to try to settle disputes."