

THE OPINION OF THE RGJ EDITORIAL BOARD

TMWA's decision to continue flat-rate plan was wrong one

Either the time is right to begin a policy, or it is not. Before Thursday's meeting, where the decision was made to extend the flat-rate policy, most Truckee Meadows Water Authority board members and officials argued that now is the right time to go to metered water usage and billing. They were on board to "flip the switch." They were derelict in declining to do so — or at least misguided.

The arguments against changing the plan now are specious. It's been reported that the current level of water storage is adequate. Apparently, it's been a good year for precipitation and capturing water reserves.

SNAPSHOT

TOPIC: Water policy

OUR VIEW: Arguments to delay metered usage are misguided.

Two summers from now, however, it is possible we'll be scrambling to implement policy that aims to recover the water savings differential between metered-rate usage of 150,000 gallons per year per customer and 250,000 gallons per year per customer.

As a second argument goes: Flat-rate customers who are elderly and on fixed incomes would be hard-pressed to pay the cost of the additional water they use. Representatives of one neighborhood plead that large properties need water and xeriscaping or cutting down trees is too expensive. That well may be. But there are other arguments that deserve consideration.

There were good reasons for planning the gradual conversion from flat-rate to meters. Foremost among them is fairness: All of us should pay the same for the water we use, no more and no less.

Another reason is to conserve water. In negotiations that made it possible for TMWA to become the area's primary water supplier, 90 percent of the single-family homes were to be outfitted before switching to meters, including all the new homes. Currently, 95 percent of residences are on meters and 85 percent are billed through them. All



Reno Mayor Bob Cashell and councilmember Dave Aiazzi were the most ardent Truckee Meadows Water Authority Board members to support starting the meters for all customers. By Thursday, they had changed their minds and led the 5-2 vote to retain the flat-rate plan until 2010.

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the conditions have been met.

Also, how can the directors justify their decision to more than 77,000 customers who volunteered to go on meters or who bought homes or businesses required to have them?

The few among the 11,000 flat-rate users who argued against going to meters are a function of refusal to change what has always been (even when change is in the public interest). Extending the flat-rate policy is a function of the board's capitulation to the few at the expense of the many.

If hardship is an issue, it's possible for the board to grant exemptions. That would be one way to help those who need it, such as the elderly on fixed incomes and people who are poverty-stricken. In fact, it would be heartless for a community not to create a plan that would accommodate needy people. Also a program to help qualified applicants to xeriscape a portion of their property

would not be out of line. Other solutions should be sought for people with large properties. If officials need ideas, they should consult utility and conservation officials in Clark County, where such programs already are in place.

Discussions about growth and scarce water resources in the high desert set the stage for implementing the meter policy now. Board members, of course, did not promise to turn the meters on this month. They campaigned for it, because all the conditions are in place, but they only planned to consider it.

Regarding conservation, drought storage and cost savings, Councilman Dave Aiazzi was quoted last month as saying, "We can't start early enough."

Two years with no plan in place — only a plan to implement a plan — is a long time out. The decision to extend the flat-rate policy was the wrong one.