**Primetime**

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**“Drought Update”**

This time of year aquifer levels move down quickly because agricultural pumpers are irrigating their crops at full speed. Despite the heavy irrigation, we can expect to stay in Stage II for the month if we get a few rains. If it is completely dry for the month, we may fall to Stage III. In the prime corn-irrigating period, March until about July 4, agricultural pumpers use about three times as much water every day as the whole City of San Antonio does.

When the farmers harvest their corn crop in early July, San Antonio becomes the primary pumper from the Edwards Aquifer. At that time, levels of the Edwards Aquifer are dependent on rainfall episodes and how San Antonio manages its water resources. If we adhere to the restrictions that are in place and use some of our reserve supplies from the Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) reservoir, we may be able to keep aquifer levels from falling too severely. Our experiences in 2009 and 2011 show the power of SAWS water management activities to maintain aquifer levels.

Aquifer levels are important because reasonable levels keep the springs at San Marcos and New Braunfels flowing, which protects the Endangered Species that reside there. Spring flow is also important to the communities and industries that rely on river flows all the way down the Guadalupe River to Victoria and the Coastal Bays and estuaries where the whooping cranes live.

The fate of Endangered Species and downstream communities may not impress you enough to motivate compliance with SAWS drought-management rules, but it is important to regional, state, and federal entities charged with protection of water rights, wildlife, and economic activity. So important, that we can expect intervention of the Courts and imposition of stricter water use limits if our own management practices do not work.

The “Good News” is that SAWS water management activities do work. If everyone complies, we can maintain aquifer levels, spring flow and have enough water for our shrubs, trees, gardens, and even our lawns.

It is not surprising that the drought-management rules work. Community leaders, industrial groups, neighborhoods, and citizen’s worked with SAWS over several years to create rules that reduced water usage but left enough water available to maintain jobs, allow indoor water use, and keep our landscapes alive. The required savings are achieved by reducing water use on lawns, not to the point that they will die, but to the point that they may not look lush green.

Water for industrial production and inside water use is not regulated by SAWS drought restrictions. The reduction of sprinkler use to once per week in Stage I and Stage II and the reduction to once every two weeks in Stage III saves the water needed. This is especially remarkable because approximately 70 percent of all SAWS and former BexarMet customers do not irrigate their lawns at all!

Those of us who do have sprinkler irrigation and water our lawn with it, have special responsibility to obey the restrictions. That compliance is not a huge burden. Yes, it requires that we keep our equipment in good order and we have to have the discipline to use our legal opportunities as they exist, but it accomplishes:

* Survival of our lawns and plants
* Keeps water costs reasonable
* Contributes to an equitable division of water for all entities in the region
* Helps avoid more severe restrictions
* Allows indoor and job related water use to be available in droughts

If you had a tough time complying with the drought restrictions in 2011 and lost part of your landscape, learn from that experience and change things so it won’t happen again.

Add more soil, convert your lawn to more drought tolerant plants, use more hardscape, or consider one or more of the many strategies offered on the SAWS website at “[www.saws.org](http://www.saws.org).”

For the specifics of SAWS water restrictions, and enforcement actions visit the SAWS website at “[www.saws.org](http://www.saws.org)” and click on Conservation.

The SAWS website also describes the wide array of incentives that SAWS offers to homeowners and other water users. Incentives that pay part of the cost of converting a water wasting landscape to a more efficient landscape; incentives that allow you to convert an inefficient irrigation system to a more efficient system; incentives that offer cost sharing for technological changes by industry that save water; and many more incentives.

For more information on maintaining your landscape in the midst of restriction, go to “[www.plantanswers.com](http://www.plantanswers.com)” and seek out my archived articles on the topic.