Preparing for a drought season

Living and operating in the Chihuahuan Desert, the term drought is not unfamiliar to El Paso Water. In fact, we continuously plan to ensure our customers have safe, reliable water during the hottest and driest months in our region.

As we anticipate considerably less water from the Rio Grande this year, we want to remind our customers of our commitment to provide water to our community, and the measures we have taken to prepare for what is ahead.

In a plentiful river water season, we get about 50% of our water from the Rio Grande, but this year we will only see 10-15% of that allotment. The amount of river water we receive is contingent on levels in the Elephant Butte Reservoir, which is significantly low this year due to several years of average snowfall and limited runoff in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado.

During times like these we take great pride in our diverse portfolio of water resources to deliver sustainable water services. For decades, EPWater has implemented new and innovative ways to provide water to our desert community, and our customers have embraced a conservation culture that is an important part of our strategy.

Meeting our water needs

When the Rio Grande is plentiful, we ease off pumping of our aquifers to preserve groundwater sources for a time when the river is in low supply. Last fall, the Public Service Board approved the drilling of six additional wells to prepare for this expected river drought. The wells will provide an additional 7.5 million gallons of new groundwater to our daily supply. We have also rehabilitated several aging wells to ensure our existing supply is not interrupted. Our peak water demand usually occurs in late May to early June when temperatures rise and the use of air conditioners and outdoor irrigation increase. We feel optimistic that even with a decreased river water supply we will be able to meet the daily peak demand with our additional groundwater resources.

The Kay Bailey Hutchison Desalination Plant will also play a critical role in meeting our city’s water demands. The plant transforms otherwise unusable brackish groundwater into fresh drinking water and can supply up to 27.5 million gallons of water daily.

Several storage tanks and reservoirs have been built in strategic locations across the city over the last few years. Although these were constructed to deal with short-term weather extremes, they will help us store water and move it to different areas when water may be in short supply.

Community efforts

By using several different water sources rather than just one, we can provide a reliable water supply and continue to support our economic vitality. We encourage our customers to make conscious and wise decisions about their water from late spring to early summer, especially outdoors.

The time-of-day watering schedule permits three days of watering your lawn, but we ask that you consider watering one or two days per week. Avoid watering at the hottest time of the day, between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., to avoid evaporation. Check your sprinklers for broken parts and consider drip irrigation. We can proudly say that water conservation has become a way of life in our community, and our customers’ efforts have made an impact.

We are not immune to drought, and that’s why our continuous investments and planning to expand our water resources pay off in times like these. Conservation also plays a crucial role in those efforts, and we ask that you remain committed to water wise habits like you have been doing for the past 30 years.