



## Frequently Asked Questions: Drought and Water Supply for 2015

### ***Overview:***

At its March meeting, the TMWA Board of Directors directed staff to begin early communication and implementing additional conservation measures in response to the area's fourth year of drought. TMWA customers are being asked to **reduce their water use by at least 10% this spring and summer**. In addition, assigned watering days and times are required. View the full Board report online: <http://goo.gl/oqXjmh> which includes an explanation of how our water system is managed in times of drought.

### ***Does this apply to all customers?***

Yes. We are asking for *at least* 10% reduction in water use from all of our customers – homes, businesses, homeowner's associations, apartments, etc. We are all in this together. And, with a small reduction in everyone's water use, we'll have sufficient drought reserves should we need them if next year is dry as well.

### ***Is this request for the whole community?***

Although not everyone in the community is a TMWA customer, we all use the same water resources: surface water and ground water. There are also many in the community who are on private wells. Remember: any water we save, both upstream and underground, will help all of us. With the seriousness of the drought, we all need to do as much as we can to reduce our water use.

### ***Why are we starting the conservation measures earlier than last year?***

Truckee River flows are projected to diminish much earlier this year, sometime in early summer. When that happens, we will begin using TMWA's drought reserves in Independence and Donner Lakes. The good news is that these reservoirs are full, even with a very poor snowpack last winter. Any water that is saved this summer will be held in those reservoirs, should we need it next year.

### ***Why 10%?***

Everyone can find a way to conserve 10%. Our planning and projections show a 10% reduction in water use will allow TMWA to retain 5,000 acre feet of water in upstream reserves. That's over 1.6 billion gallons of water (1,629,266,900 gallons). This will help us maintain sufficient reserve water supplies for next year, should the drought continue.

### ***Why at least 10%?***

The seriousness of the drought means everyone needs to find ways to conserve. Many of our customers have always been diligent about responsible water use and are already doing their part. Other customers may be able to cut even more than 10%.

### ***You are asking me to save at least 10%; what is it compared to?***

We are asking all of our customers to reduce their use by at least 10% compared to their 2013 usage levels. You can find your 2013 usage on your online account at [www.tmwa.com](http://www.tmwa.com) and log into your account.

### ***How is the Truckee Meadows prepared for a drought?***

Drought is a natural occurrence in the high desert and this community is well prepared. We are fortunate to have a robust supply system of upstream reservoirs and underground reserves available for use during dry years. Groundwater supplies are also enhanced and protected each winter when TMWA pumps approximately eight million gallons of treated water *per day* through its wells into the aquifer for future drought-year use.



TMWA plans for dry years. Our staff continually monitors weather and snowpack conditions and plans for a nine-year drought cycle, which is one year longer than the worst drought on record. For a deeper look at TMWA's resource planning, view the 2010-2030 Water Resource Plan at [tmwa.com/water\\_system/resources/2030wrp](http://tmwa.com/water_system/resources/2030wrp) which was adopted by the TMWA Board of Directors in 2009. Portions of the plan are incorporated into the Regional Water Management Plan which is maintained by the Western Regional Water Commission. In addition, this is a community that has always focused on water conservation, not only in dry years, but in plentiful years. Our citizens have always valued our precious water resources and conservation.

***What will happen to the flows in the Truckee River?***

Reservoir releases from Lake Tahoe and Boca Reservoir (which are not TMWA drought reserves) are required to meet mandated river flows at the CA/NV state line. These releases are administered by the Federal Water Master under court decrees from the 1940's. Water levels in Lake Tahoe and Boca Reservoir will be exhausted and not able to release water to meet required minimum flows sometime in May. When that happens, TMWA will be making releases from our drought storage reservoirs (Donner and Independence Lakes) to supply water to our treatment plants and pumping additional water from our wells.

***Should we focus on outdoor watering?***

Yes. The average customer's water use is approximately four times higher in the summer, due to outdoor water use. Focusing on outdoor water use provides the best opportunity for the largest water savings.

***Assigned-Day Watering details:***

Assigned Day Watering is in effect. As a reminder, each home or business has three days to water each week. If Please don't water on Mondays, as it is a day of rest for the water system, giving it a chance to recharge. Keep in mind weather-wise watering: water deeper and less often; water at cooler times of day to avoid high temperatures; never water when it is windy; and reduce watering in the fall to help lawns and plants go dormant.

***What are the best times of day for lawn watering?***

The best times to water your lawn are late at night or early in the morning when the ground and air temperatures are cool. In normal years, we ask our customers to not water between noon and 6 p.m. from Memorial Day through Labor Day. In drought years like this, no-watering times are expanded to between 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.

***When are no-watering times in effect?***

The no-watering times will be from 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. starting on Memorial Day, May 25 through Labor Day, Sept 7. In the Truckee Meadows, this time of the day is typically the hottest and windiest when more water is lost to evaporation.

***How will the conservation rules be enforced?***

We are serious about encouraging responsible water use and preventing waste. If you see water being wasted, please let us know and call the conservation department at 834-8005. Many customers simply do not realize they have a leak or broken sprinkler head. Those customers who waste water will be contacted **and** if the waste continues, they can be penalized on their water bill. We will also have staff patrolling seven days a week during the watering season, as we have for many years, looking for water waste

***Why don't we go back to Twice-a-Week Watering to save water?***

Research has shown that three-day-a-week watering has resulted in less water use system wide. Most customers were overwatering when on a two-day schedule as there was a bigger time gap between watering days We studied water-use data for many years before converting to three-day watering and found that the three-day schedule results in less watering and waste. In addition, it is less stressful on landscape than twice-a-week watering.



***Does TMWA offer rebate programs for grass removal, xeriscaping or purchasing water-efficient appliances?***  
At TMWA, we are keenly aware that the conversion to more water-efficient landscaping and appliances is very important in this region—especially in drought years. With this in mind, we are researching ways to fund rebate programs that will not raise customer rates. Unlike California, where the state funds these programs, TMWA has no funding available at this time.

***Can the water we conserve everyday be used for growth - to build more houses or businesses?***  
The answer is no. 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 is retained in our drought reserves or is released to benefit river system health. TMWA does not resell conserved water to serve new houses or businesses.

***So, how can we continue to build more houses if existing residents are being asked to conserve?***  
Your home has dedicated water rights that cannot be taken if you conserve. There is a finite amount of water rights available in the Truckee Meadows. No growth can occur beyond that limit. Your home or business has a service commitment from the utility (backed by water rights). The water rights used for the service commitment to your home or business 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 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.

***As to the question of TMWA's position on growth in general:***  
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.

*Truckee Meadows Water Authority (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 380,000 residents of the Truckee Meadows.*

*April 15, 2015*