

Conserving Oklahoma's Water

Because water is usually so plentiful, available and cheap, we often casually disregard its importance and consider it an almost limitless resource. But world water usage has tripled since 1950 and users and suppliers in the U.S., especially in California, Nevada, Colorado and Florida, have been forced to deal with the harsh reality of dwindling water supplies.

While many regions of Oklahoma are blessed with abundant water supplies, other areas, particularly in the semi-arid west, are not. And the distance between the state's water supplies and many rural residents who need it is so great that the expense of delivering that water is prohibitive. From a hydrological standpoint, evaporation and percolation preclude immediate use of approximately 80 percent of Oklahoma's water. Average annual lake evaporation ranges from 48 inches in the east to 65 inches in the southwest, amounts that far exceed the average yearly rainfall in those areas.

Episodes of water shortages and drought are inevitable in Oklahoma. While local and

state governments are working toward becoming prepared to deal with these emergencies, decision-makers, water managers and citizens must also realize that there are water use guidelines that can often stave off critical dry periods and the hardships associated with them. Growing concern for the preservation of state rivers, fisheries and recreational opportunities, combined with the high costs of water development, necessitate better planning, innovative water management and water conservation to maintain supplies and satisfy increasing demands.

Conservation of our water resources -- specifically, activities designed to reduce water demand and improve efficiency of use -- and ensuring the availability of fresh water for future generations involves changing habits and altering the manner in which we conduct our daily routines. Water conservation is both a physical and hydrologic process that involves using less water and a behavioral concept that emphasizes using water more efficiently and economically, thereby preserving and extending limited supplies. Although many water-using activities seem so mundane and unimportant compared to the many other aspects

