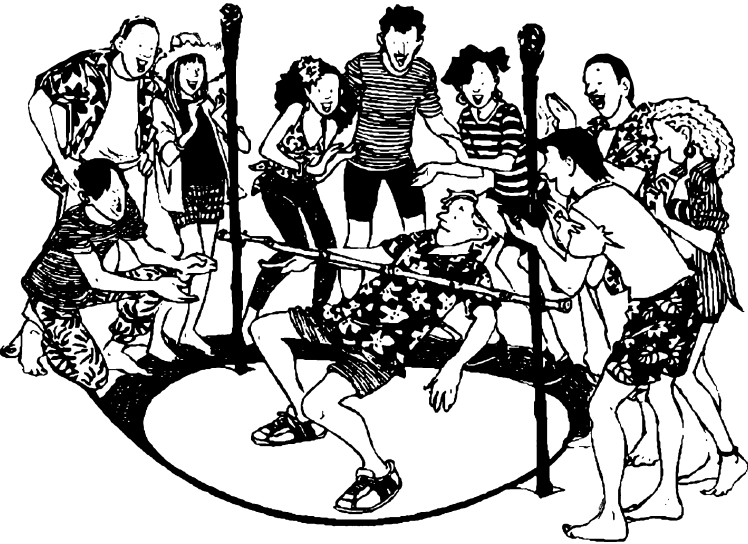




C O N S E R V A T I O N Current

A Newsletter Published by the New Mexico Water Conservation Alliance

Water Limbo: How Low Can You Go?



"The prizes can be used for xeriscape or hardscape (playground equipment, etc.) park projects in the neighborhood, or another City approved neighborhood project."

Albuquerque has issued two water-conservation challenges to the City's Neighborhood Associations for May-October 2004. Participating associations can compete to save the most water in two ways:

- 1) *Growing Smarter*: \$10,000 goes to the association that converts the most high-water-use landscape, in accordance with the City's xeriscape program requirements. The conversions must be begun and completed between May 1 and October 31, 2004, and at least 10,000 ft² must be converted.
- 2) *Water Limbo*: Another \$10,000 goes to the association that achieves the greatest overall reduction in water use over the 6-month period (beyond a 10% minimum). There will also be monthly prizes for the greatest reduction in water use compared to the same period last year. The prizes vary with number of participants and percentage of reduction, up to \$2,000. Percentage reductions will be based on the group's average water savings; at least a 10% reduction

must be achieved. At least five neighborhood associations must participate for the monthly prizes to be awarded.

Associations may partner with commercial firms or other organizations, whose water-saving achievements may be included in the association's total even if the partner is not located in the neighborhood. All eligible participants may also receive the City's xeriscape rebate.

The prizes can be used for xeriscape or hardscape (playground equipment, etc.) park projects in the neighborhood, or another City approved neighborhood project.

Before beginning, the neighborhood association should be sure to talk with the City's Water Conservation Division, to clarify their water-use baseline and be sure they understand the challenge conditions.

If interested, contact Cynthia Miles at (505) 768-3634 or Katherine Yuhas at (505) 768-3655.

Legislation Update

This year's legislative short session was more a preview of coming attractions than a first-run water-policy event. Many water bills were introduced during this short session, announcing water-management topics of major concern. Few were successful.

OSE Water Conservation Program: A major expansion request for the Office of the State Engineer's (OSE) water use and conservation division did not pass. The division has growing responsibilities, and will be challenged by the lack of funds.

Water harvesting: A bill to require minimum water-harvesting-system standards for all new landscaped commercial buildings did well, but did not pass. It can be expected again next year.

Plumbing and hot water systems: A proposed amendment to CID (Construction Industries Division) standards to require that plumbing systems in new construction include instantaneous water heaters, didn't get through. However, House Joint Memorial 2 did pass, asking CID to adopt provisions for water-efficient plumbing. It can be seen as a call to action.

Domestic Wells: Several bills touched domestic wells. One proposed creating a domestic-well-impact fund

Legislation Update, continued on page 2

News bits

Community Water Conference: Protecting Our Most Valued Treasure

The Rio Grande Basin Initiative¹ and the NMWCA invite water managers, urban planners, water-conservation specialists, academics and researchers, landscape architects, and others with an interest in efficient use of community water, to come together at the Sheraton Old Town in Albuquerque, NM between August 31st and September 2nd, 2004.

Sessions will address: Strategic planning for demand management; water loss and leak detection; drought management tools; recycled water management; gray water recycling; alternative water supplies; rebate

programs; rate structures; legislative water issues; and management of water supply.

Poster Sessions: Researchers, graduate students, organizations and other interested participants are invited to submit a poster.

Exhibitors: Public and private corporations, federal and state agencies, assistance providers, and educational programs are welcome to exhibit.

Exhibitors should contact Christy Smith (505) 855-5241 or by e-mail: csmith2@ch2m.com. More information at the conference website at <http://www.watertaskforce.org/conference>.

Water Fun in Middle School:

Between April 19th and May 7th, actors from the National Theater for Children will hold a series of "Jeopardy" style water-quiz events for Albuquerque middle school students. At each event, students form teams and the teams race to answer questions about water. Members of the public are invited to join science classes in this energetic and fun experience—there will be several events at every Albuquerque middle school—you can choose a day or choose a school.

For information and a schedule, call Roberta Haynes-Sparks, the City's Water Education Coordinator at (505) 768-3245.

Water Use Report: You will find fifty years of water use information in the U.S. Geological Survey's water use report, "Estimated Use of Water in the United States in 2000."

The report, issued every five years, is available online at <http://water.usgs.gov/pubs/circ/2004/circ1268/>.

1. A joint project of New Mexico State University and Texas A&M University to meet present and future water demand through conservation measures.



Legislation Update, continued from page 1

with domestic-well fees. Another, the "Active Water Resource Management Act," would provide that groundwater areas needing special protection be designated "critical management areas" (CMAs). In a CMA, the state engineer could deny or limit a domestic well permit, requiring the applicant to obtain and retire an existing water right to secure domestic water. Neither was enacted, but both should be taken seriously for next session.

Water-resource-use fees: Two similar bills proposed charging differentiated fees for all water use, including agricultural, municipal, and industrial. One version, introduced by Mimi Stewart, directed the several agencies benefiting from the fund created by the fees to use the revenues for water conservation and administration. The other, sponsored by Manny Aragon, proposed somewhat lower fees and dedicated all revenues to the OSE for adjudications, hydrologic investigations,

and active water management. Neither bill came to the floor.

The Alliance supported the Stewart bill because it would provide resources for New Mexico's fund-starved conservation efforts; the OSE supported the Aragon bill because it provides the agency with important operational revenues for adjudications. The water resource fee itself is more important to both groups than the ultimate use of the funds. Nevertheless, conservation programs will appreciate any informal lobbying on behalf of the Mimi Stewart alternative.

Water Trust Board: None of the bills proposing changes to the Water Trust Board passed, and no funds were allocated to the Board by this legislature.

A Strategic water reserve was proposed to establish a fund for state water purchases for water shortages. It did not pass, and is likely to reappear in next year's long session.

Salcedar control: HB2 allocates up to \$500,000 to develop a statewide strategic plan for phreatophyte treatment and long-term watershed management. In addition, \$2.4 million is provided to control phreatophytes on the Pecos, Canadian and Rio Grande during FY2004-2006, and \$2.4 million for restoration and revegetation of native species on those rivers. \$200,000 more is provided to New Mexico Tech to determine the water savings resulting from phreatophyte treatment.

An acequia project fund was created.

Regulation of livestock ponds was tightened by eliminating a loophole that allowed aesthetic ponds to qualify under stock-pond provisions.

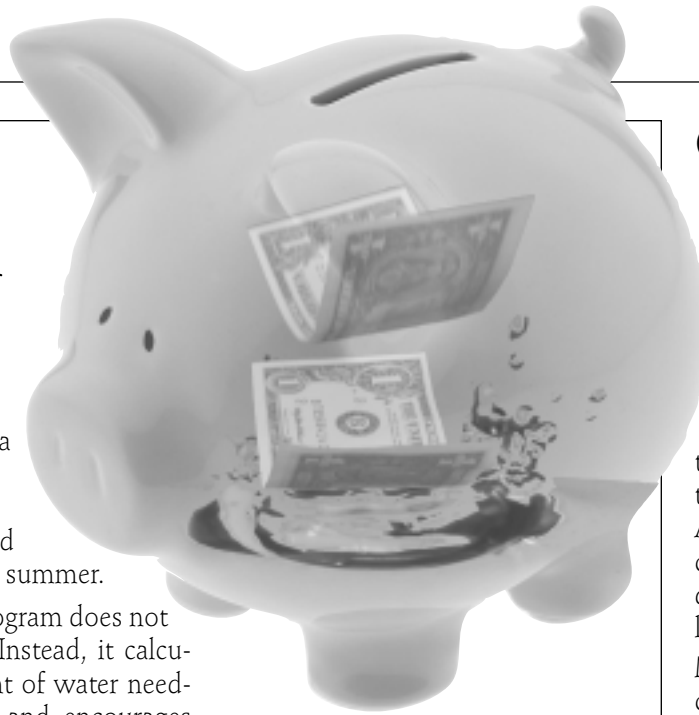
Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority: Two bills were introduced to clarify the Authority's powers. Neither passed. This legislation is also likely to be revisited in the coming long session.

Pilot Study in Santa Fe

The City of Santa Fe proposes to conduct a pilot study of budget-based water allotments this summer.

This conservation program does not restrict water uses. Instead, it calculates the total amount of water needed by a household, and encourages customers to stay within that water budget by imposing substantial surcharges when the budget is exceeded. The budget-based water allotment gives responsibility back to the consumer—there are no restricted water uses, no water police, no reporting on neighbors who violate the regulations. The motivation to conserve is financially driven—the monthly bill tells consumers whether they are using too much water.

Santa Fe's water conservation office offers free site visits/audits to detect leaks, retrofit showerheads and aera-



tors and help with outdoor irrigation and landscape recommendations. The Budget-based water allotment gives the City and the customer the same goal: low water bills.

If it is approved, the year-long pilot program will begin in August with 100 volunteer single-family residences. Its objectives are to test the billing system and weed out problems, to get feedback from consumers and determine the program's water savings, and to weigh the program's cost against the water savings and benefits.

Our Readers Tell Us

Thanks to the 44 respondents to the January survey! The response rate was nearly 25%, very high for any mailed survey. Here's some of what we heard:

Conservation Current

Most respondents preferred to receive the *Current* electronically. About a third wanted a paper copy. The Alliance may offer subscribers the choice of paper vs. electronic, while distributing more paper copies in public places.

Most respondents liked the *Current* to come out quarterly, and most reported that they read it faithfully. The topics readers wanted to see in the *Current* included most water-conservation areas of interest.

Alliance Programs

There was interest in Alliance-sponsored workshops on emerging technology, product fairs, and briefings on proposed legislation. Also requested: more brochures, connections with conservation-funding sources, information clearinghouse of successful water-conservation programs, forums with state and federal legislators, and help with promotion.

Alliance meetings

About a third of the respondents said they would come to an Alliance meeting if there was a speaker of interest: state officials, conservation scientists and experts, senators, and environmental advocates were mentioned.

How it works

For each account, a baseline water budget is determined based on the number of people in the household. The landscaping portion of the budget varies each month as evapotranspiration rates vary, but does not vary with lot size. Water harvesting and grey water systems can be used to increase the landscaped area. The baseline aims to give each household enough water at the base price for water-conserving indoor use and careful outdoor use.

The water rate for the baseline amount is presently \$4.09/1,000 gallons. Customers using more than the base-

line must pay a conservation surcharge. The surcharge increases as the excess of water use over the baseline increases. For water use beyond 10,000 gallons over the baseline, the water rate can be as high as \$14.09/1,000 gallons.

Under a declared water emergency, surcharges will double, and in addition, the baseline will be reduced.

For more information, call Daniel Ransom, Santa Fe's water conservation specialist, at (505) 955-4221, or e-mail at dsransom@ci.santa-fe.nm.us.

Alliance meetings are held on the second Thursday of odd-numbered months between 1 and 3 pm. The May 13th meeting will be at the Bureau of Reclamation Office in Albuquerque at 555 Broadway NE in the Rio Grande Room. Beth Bardwell of the World Wildlife Fund will speak about the Rio Grande Initiative



Cheri Vogel will be sending an announcement of the location and agenda a couple of weeks before the meeting. To be included in the list receiving this announcement, contact her at cvogel@ose.state.nm.us.

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Seniors to Receive Xeriscaping

The City of Albuquerque and the Xeriscape Council of New Mexico have contracted to xeriscape fifteen front yards for low-income Albuquerque seniors.

Members of a graduate landscape plants class at UNM, led by instructor Judith Phillips, will design each of the yards. Master Gardeners will work with each homeowner throughout the project to explain exactly what is occurring and help define maintenance required after completion.

Scott Varner of the Xeriscape Council leads and coordinates the project. He has mobilized contribu-

tions of plants, labor, gravel, tree removal, irrigation and controller materials and installation, maintenance instructions, follow-up with the homeowners, and cleanup during the project from contributing organizations. Any additional costs will be offset by monies from the City's xeriscape rebate program, determined by the square footage of high water use sod removed.

If you would like to donate services, materials, money, etc., for this project, please contact Scott Varner at (505) 468-1021 or email him at scott@xeriscapenm.com.

The Xeriscape Council's website is: www.xeriscapenm.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Rowlands Nursery
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