

SINK OR SWIM TIME

Sandra Postel and other Irrigation Show speakers say our water-use policies and practices must change rapidly and drastically to support our blue planet's projected population boom to 9 billion people by 2050.

BY **MARTY WHITFORD** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

SOMETHING'S GOTTA GIVE. We can't keep using water at the rate we are — especially when “we” are rapidly expanding while our fresh-water reservoirs are evaporating.

“Water is finite and there is no substitute for it,” said Sandra Postel, who delivered the keynote address at the Irrigation Association's 2009 Irrigation Show. Held in December in San Antonio, TX, the Irrigation Show drew about 4,500 attendees and 290 exhibitors.

“Every year, 2010 through 2025, the world's population is projected to grow by more than 75 million people. That's the equivalent of adding two Californias annually,” said Postel, who directs the Global Water Policy Project and authored “Last Oasis: Water Scarcity” and “Pillar of Sand: Can the Irrigation Miracle Last?”

Eight hundred gallons. Sound like a boatload of water? Actually, Postel said it's just the average American's daily “water footprint” — which includes not only the water each of us drinks and uses for landscape irrigation, bathing, cooking, etc., but also all of the water required for the products we use, food we eat and other beverages we drink. Fortunately, the rest of the planet's water footprint, on average, is half ours.

From 1950 to 2000, the United States' population doubled, but our nation's water use tripled, noted Beth Koprowski, a senior environmental communications specialist with ERG in Arlington, Va. Part of panel delivering a briefing on the U.S. EPA's WaterSense program, Koprowski said 36 states predict water shortages by 2013.



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— IA'S ANDY SMITH

“Outdoor uses account for an estimated 30% of residential water consumption — and this figure is as high as 70% in some areas of the West and Southwest,” Koprowski said. “Further compounding matters, many of the states with the highest per capita water consumption are projected to experience the greatest population booms over the next two decades.”

Changing unintelligent water-use practices and shortsighted water policies — such as subsidies in Las Vegas



Water-use expert Sandra Postel says the marriage of IT and ET holds great promise.

that have resulted in water costing nearly one-third what it does in Cleveland, which sits on the shores of Lake Erie — won't come easy. Nevertheless, these changes must come — and they must be rapid and sweeping, Irrigation Show speakers concurred.

“Part of the problem is we can't manage very well what we don't measure and monitor,” Postel adds. “But a lengthy pipeline of wonderful irrigation innovations, many of which are showcased here, hold great potential. This developing marriage of IT (information technology) and ET (evapotranspiration) — namely smart controllers tied to sensors monitoring real-time weather, soil and other conditions — will help us make wiser, more cost-efficient irrigation decisions.”

Landscapers can expect to see more turf and plant restrictions, irrigation bans and more-limited access to potable water, as our nation's population continues to grow by more than 3 million people per year, said Andy Smith, IA's external affairs director.

“Landscape irrigation uses an estimated 7.8 billion gallons of water per day, according to the U.S. EPA,” Smith noted. “The bottom line is ‘business as usual’ cannot continue.” **LM**