

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

The old saying, “Necessity is the mother of invention,” is certainly true in the water crisis that has gripped major areas of the country. Officials have invented new rules for water use, and golf interests are inventing new ways to deal with them.

The first thing on the normal list of watering restrictions (usually constructed by a governor or a water-management district) is to cut back all that “wasteful” watering of golf courses. Golf hasn’t been able to shake the idea that it’s an elitist game, despite the fact that golf is everyone’s game, and nationwide courses only use about 2 percent of the water consumed daily. Restrictions based on perceptions instead of data must be challenged wherever they occur.

I agree that within a given area there is a finite limit to how many withdrawals can be made from a water source, whether it’s a deep well or surface water. Couple that with a prolonged drought, and cheap accessible water can get scarce. But one other thing is also true: We are not running out of water. It’s a renewable resource. The challenge comes in making changes to how and where we get our water and how efficiently we use it.

There’s another side to the water restrictions issue besides bona fide drought conditions, and it’s the increased demands on our local water resources. The “no growth” and “not in my backyard” folks use these drought-induced water shortages to advance their agendas. Targeting golf as a big water user is an old ploy whose time is running out. We are getting more pro-active on the issue — and not a moment too soon.

Thanks to several superintendent associations and certain individuals, a degree of sanity is creeping into the water regulatory process. Superintendents are volunteering to serve on boards at water authorities bringing real-world perspectives, modern practices and data to the table, while getting officials to acknowledge that consumptive water permits in Florida only cover 40 percent of a user’s annual need. As one water-management district chairman told me, “If Anheuser-Busch can have water to make beer, golf should be able to water greens.” At least this gentleman recognized that golf was a business and not only a game.

Golf’s Water-Use Myth Stays Strong

BY JOEL JACKSON



ONLY
SUPERINTENDENTS
CAN HELP DISPEL
THE LINGERING
PERCEPTION OF
GOLF COURSES AS
WATER WASTERS

It’s incredible to read that some states are just now beginning to think about developing reclaimed water as a source for golf and landscape irrigation. They’re also endorsing the “radical” practice of using flow meters.

Hah! Florida superintendents have been reading flow meters and sending in monthly water-use reports for decades. Maybe we can’t hold a decent election, but we are way ahead on alternative water sources and documenting use.

The Georgia GCSA has joined an agricultural-based alliance with a lobbyist to make sure golf remains classified as an agricultural-based commodity that’s protected under existing Georgia water law. The association is willing to work with regional water authorities to help practice conservation, but it had to unite to fight off those calling for watering bans on golf courses.

Other associations are developing state-specific best management practices (BMPs) or using ones developed by universities. New Jersey water restrictions cite the Rutgers BMPs for golf course irrigation as guidelines for using water resources during drought conditions and mandatory 20 percent cutbacks.

Job security may have some folks fudging on the restrictions, but with the “water police” and nosy neighbors out there with camcorders, you might find yourself in a crisis on the six o’clock news. If you have to water on the sly to keep the turf alive, try to reduce overall use and document your savings over normal consumption.

Better still, become active in creating new water rules that provide a win-win solution for everyone.

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