

EDITORIAL: Valley leaders must embrace water recycling

BY THE FRESNO BEE EDITORIAL BOARD

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Drought or no drought, one of California's biggest challenges is providing enough water to improve our economy, use our fertile soils and ever-present sun to feed the world, and accommodate population growth.

Though in some quarters it is fashionable to be pessimistic about our state's future, the truth is that we can solve the water puzzle if we put our minds to it and capitalize on technology.

The reality is that we waste too much water. Every precious drop that is wasted could instead be freed up to restock our aquifers or to lift up the economy and put more Californians to work.

Some water-saving measures can be taken individually. If you have a standard toilet that uses about 3.5 gallons per flush, replace it with a low-flow model using less than half that amount. Swapping out a standard top-loading washer for a high-efficiency model will cut water consumption from 34 gallons a load to 15 gallons or less. If you're on metered water, these two changes will cut your water bills.

Our elected leaders must become involved in the solutions, too. As a front-page story in Monday's Bee pointed out, California is just scratching the surface when it comes to water recycling -- using treated wastewater for landscaping or, as Orange County does, injecting highly treated wastewater into aquifers and withdrawing it later for drinking.

Unfortunately, San Joaquin Valley communities are lagging in the water recycling effort. We need to get up to speed and take advantage of \$200 billion in grants and \$800 million in low-interest loans that are available from state drought relief funds.

We also must get tougher with developers and require master-planned communities to use recycled wastewater for home and common-area landscaping. As Monday's story detailed, the developers of Serrano, a gated subdivision in El Dorado Hills, which is 22 miles east of Sacramento, embraced recycling after realizing it was the only way to get their homes built. The developers spent \$10 million to upgrade treatment plants and install pipelines. Recycling began with the project's golf course, but later expanded to all home landscaping.

Everyone must do their part. For individuals, it can be as simple as taking shorter showers (cutting your shower time from eight minutes to five minutes reduces household water consumption by about 8%). Or replacing thirsty landscaping with drought-tolerant plants.

But local officials also must seriously look at recycling water. Our future depends on leveraging technology to stretch every acre-foot of this precious resource.