

Clovis adopts rules to slash water use by 36%

By Marc Benjamin

Landscaping in a Clovis subdivision that's sprinkled with reclaimed water.

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- Clovis City Council approved a plan it hopes will slash water consumption by 36%.
- Residents, businesses and other water users could face fines if they don't cut water use.
- City has cut water consumption by 10% since 2013, but the state wants deeper cuts.

Clovis City Council members approved plans Monday night that they hope will cut water use 36% citywide, an amount dictated by the state.

Even though the city had enough water to meet its needs this year, and it had already cut water consumption by 10% compared to 2013, the state conservation proposal dictated a 36% reduction for Clovis compared with 2013.

Luke Serpa, Clovis' public utilities director, said the city's dry climate and large lots with investments in lush landscaping hurt the city. The new rules, approved on a 5-0 vote, will go into effect on June 1.

"We're not really happy with what we're bringing before you," Serpa told the City Council. "But our hand has been forced by the state."

Council Member Jose Flores said he was disappointed the state took its action.

"We were preparing, Clovis was ready for this drought and we did everything right," he said. "It just shows that no good deed goes unpunished."

Mayor Nathan Magsig said the city has water and can have water for the next three years because of water banking and its water-recycling facility.

The city plans to institute fines based on water meter readings. The city is calculating bills, which are issued every other month, so each water customer will know how much they can use before being fined, Serpa said. Fines for homeowners in violation will be \$25 for a first offense and \$50 thereafter. Businesses and other users also could face fines.

Residents also will be ordered to reduce landscape watering from three days to two days each week.



The watering reductions will affect the city's revenues, Serpa said, because water rates are based on usage tiers — use more, pay more. If revenues go down, a rate increase may be necessary.

In 2014, the city of 102,000 residents cut its water consumption from more than 27,000 to 25,000 acre feet. This year, the state's cut will mean the city can use only 17,600 acre feet.

Clovis has invested about \$130 million in a new water treatment plant with a water allocation from Fresno Irrigation District to boost supplies, built a sewage treatment and water-recycling facility, as well as a water bank near Kerman. The city will tap its water bank for 3,000 acre feet for the first time this summer.

The city already is using water from the water-recycling facility at Sierra Meadows and Pasa Tiempo parks, and at Clovis Community Medical Center. Any recycled water used does not count against the city's 36% reduction. Also, the city is seeking state recognition for banked water not to count against the city's supply as the new state rules go into effect.

Resident Phyllis Williams said the city should have cut its water consumption two years ago.

"Whether we like it or not, we'll have to do it," she said. "Our neighborhoods are going to go brown unless we want the city to be fined \$10,000 a day."

Resident Martha Lucey suggested the city consider that constant violators could work off their fines by attending water school and learning to improve conservation.

It would "foster the public perception that we are trying to do something more than just fining people."

Lloyd Shaffer said he may be one of those people fined because landscaping is what makes Clovis and his neighborhood attractive.

"I don't want to see our beautiful neighborhoods go brown," he said.

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