

Clovis capping 39,000 sprinklers to save water

By Marc Benjamin



Jonoven McDowell starts digging in the grass to start the process to remove a sprinkler on Shepherd Avenue in Clovis on Wednesday morning. MARC BENJAMIN — THE FRESNO BEE

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- *Trees will be spared under the city's plans*
- *Clovis will continue to maintain grass in parks*
- *City must cut water consumption by 36% from 2013 water use*



Clovis parks workers began capping sprinklers Wednesday on landscaped areas along city streets, part of the city's campaign to cut water consumption 36% as required by the state's new rules.



When the four city workers are done in June, 39,000 sprinklers will be capped, said Eric Aller, the city's parks manager. Sprinklers for trees will remain intact to keep them alive, and park turf will get less water but also remain

intact, he said.

Within a few weeks, Aller said, the grass will start to brown, and after the drought ends the grass will not return.

Eventually, the city will use bark or ornamental shrubs between the trees and consider drip irrigation systems to keep trees and shrubs healthy. It's possible the city may resort to landscaping with just wood chips, he said.

In parks, grass and trees will get watered less, although more water will go to keep the trees alive.

"We don't want to kill off our parks," he said. Less water "will stress out the turf, but it will not die."

The cost for capping the sprinklers is about \$75,000, said Scott Redelfs, an assistant public utilities director for Clovis.

The city has to reduce water use from 505 million gallons in 2013 to 323 million gallons this year, said Lisa Koehn, a Clovis assistant public utilities director. Last year, the city reduced its use by about 57 million gallons, she said.

Koehn said the city is judging its priorities for water, and grass between sidewalks and streets is among the first to go.

"It's the same way that people have to prioritize at their homes," Koehn said. "It's just on a much bigger scale."

Clovis residents soon will be advised in their bills about the goals they need to meet to avoid financial penalties. The city plans to institute fines based on water meter readings. A first-time violator will be fined \$25. Additional violations will result in \$50 fines added to city water bills, which are sent every two months. Businesses and other users also could face fines.

Last month, City Council members approved plans to cut water use 36% citywide, an amount dictated by the state.

City officials noted that the city's dry climate and homes with generally larger lots and major investments in lush landscaping pushed up water demands, which had hurt the city when the state was determining cutbacks.

Residents also were ordered to reduce landscape watering from three days weekly to two.

In 2014, the city of 104,000 residents cut water consumption from more than 27,000 to 25,000 acre-feet. This year, the state's rules 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, and invested in a water bank near Kerman. The city will siphon 3,000 acre-feet from the water bank 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. Recycled water use does not count against the city's 36% reduction.

Also, the city wants the state not to include Clovis' use of banked water as the new state cutback rules go into effect.

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