

Water Use in Oregon

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Recently, when I was doing some research, I found some numbers and facts that were updated in 2003 that came as a surprise to me. What really struck my attention were facts posted on the United States Geological Survey (USGS) web site. Take a look when you have more than a minute. As I played with the numbers they posted, some of my beliefs were shown in a different light. Being a native of Oregon I had a mind-set as to our water, it's always been there for us because of all the abundant rain and snow.

According to USGS, estimates vary, each person uses about 80-100 gallons of water per day. Some estimates are as high as 100-250 gpd. The largest use of household water is to flush toilets, shower or baths, laundry, etc. but not for human consumption. Many local governments now have laws that specify water flow rates, which is why these days we are seeing toilets, showers, and faucets with flow restrictions.

Water is a resource that we often take for granted. We watch the rain fall or stand on the bank of a river and assume that our water needs will be taken care of; that water is free and readily available to all. But a closer look reveals that it's not that simple. In many dry areas, water is a very limited resource and in other areas, water is being contaminated by various sources of pollution.

The search is on for ways to eliminate or reduce pollution. One important approach not usually considered to reduce pollution is reducing the quantity of water used. According to USGS, when you do the math as I did, Oregon residents averaged 230 gallons of water per day and other states average less than 40. Oregon, contrary to most resident's beliefs, does not have a very high inland water area. In fact Oregon is tied with Nebraska in twelfth from the bottom with a 0.9% land water area ratio. Using less water can reduce the need for larger wastewater systems, additional reservoir capacity, and larger water producing facilities.

Of the nation's water, 55% is taken from surface sources. Surface water withdrawals or diversions can result in degraded aquatic habitat and wetlands.

Water use efficiency has other benefits too, such as saving money. For example, a leak caused by a faulty flush valve in a toilet tank can waste as much as 10 gallons of water an hour, costing \$100 per year at \$1.20/1,000 gallons. More than 40 states now have some type of water conservation program, and more than 80 percent of water utility customers are willing to use some form of water conservation measure. The groundwork has already been laid, for either starting and/or expanding programs to encourage water use efficiency. A number of practices, programs, and strategies can be implemented now. Some involve engineering practices based on modifications of plumbing, fixtures, or operating procedures. Others involve behavioral changes in water use habits. They range from the very simple (a new hose nozzle) to the complex (redesigning a water system). From the Pacific coast to the Atlantic coast, water conservation and use efficiency practices are saving water and reducing source pollution.

What's being done to conserve this resource where you live? And what more can you and your community do? Make time to review your system.