

Take these steps to conserve water

By April Ingle and Joe Cook

For the past two decades, Georgia has tried to win the so-called tri-state water wars by paying high-priced lawyers to fight in court.

This expensive “strategy” has cost Georgia taxpayers millions of our hard-earned dollars and has done little but make a couple of big law firms richer.

It hasn't secured us access to viable drinking water for the future and it hasn't done anything to promote real or responsible conservation.

For the more than million metro Atlantans who rely on Lake Lanier for drinking water, the prospect of running out of water is all too real.

We must change. We cannot continue to act like that football coach who keeps running the same play over and over again only to fall short of a first down time and time again.

We need common sense solutions that we can start working on today.

Now is the time for local and state political leaders, business leaders and the environmental community to set aside a “them vs. us” mentality and work together for permanent solutions to our water use problems.

Part of any permanent solution to our water supply dilemma must be a serious improvement in the way we use water.

It's not just about how much we keep; it's about how we use what we have.

According to the state, the average Georgia resident uses between 60 and 88 gallons of water each day.

Research conducted by the American Water Works Association determined that using existing water-efficient technology could reduce indoor water use to 45 gallons per person per day for single-family homes, a savings of 25 percent to 48 percent.

Such a level of savings would translate to greater water supply for metro Atlanta as well as more water for downstream communities.

Here are three common sense ideas that will save money for taxpayers, secure water supply for future use and lessen the strain on an already over-burdened Chattahoochee River system:

1. Fix leaky pipes: Metro Atlanta water utilities estimate an average of 16 percent of the water they treat at their plants is lost to leaks in pipes before it ever reaches our taps.

We need incentives and mandates to find the leaks and fix them fast.

Reducing leaks could save nearly 60 million gallons of water a day, nearly one-third the amount that metro Atlanta gets from Lake Lanier.

2. Offer incentives for replacing water wasting toilets: Provide tax credits, rebates and other ways to change out wasteful toilets and other plumbing fixtures. Replacing inefficient plumbing can save nearly 55 million gallons of water a day in metro Atlanta.

3. Stop outdoor watering during daytime hours: Provide incentives and consider mandates where it makes sense to stop outdoor watering during the daytime (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) when most water applied to landscapes evaporates anyway.

These cost-effective policies, combined with using electricity more efficiently, can help utility ratepayers and taxpayers avoid the higher costs of providing more water and power.

A report released by American Rivers last fall shows how metro Atlanta taxpayers can save up to \$700 million over the cost of building new reservoirs.

By demonstrating that we are responsible stewards of water, we can make a more legitimate case for metro Atlanta to get its drinking water out of Lake Lanier.

If we can demonstrate good faith by increasing efficiency while reducing long-term demand, raising the pool elevation of Lake Lanier a few feet, increasing its storage capacity, may be a realistic option for all parties.

We have the right tools to bring about cost-effective solutions with immediate results.

All we need is the political will and leadership to enact common sense solutions today, instead of continuing to pay legal fees for yet another uncertain result tomorrow.

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