**Proposal Changes to Drought Restrictions**

A recent article in the San Antonio Express News announced proposed changes to the San Antonio Water System (SAWS) Drought Restrictions.

SAWS officials think that they can reduce water uses adequately even if they liberalize some of the restrictions. Among the rule changes proposed are

(1) Eliminating the Stage I once/weak restriction in favor of an “Aquifer Alert” status.

Irrigators could water on any day during the period, but an aggressive outreach and education effort would prepare everyone for Stage II at 650 feet MSL.

(2) Stage II would begin the once-per-week watering requirements based on your address. Enforcement would begin immediately and there would not be any warnings. Violators would receive a misdemeanor citation.

(3) The watering times would change from the current 3–8 a.m. and 8–10 p.m. in Stage II to 6–10 a.m. and 6–10 p.m. Besides adding a few hours of irrigation time, this change would sacrifice a small amount of water to evaporation but would make it much easier for hose-draggers to water their lawns. It would also make it easier to discover leaks and malfunctions.

(4) Rules on residential and indoor fountain use and swimming pools would be liberalized. The justification is that the water use for these luxury items is minimal when compared to lawn watering.

(5) Outdoor commercial fountain operators can apply for a variance to operate in Stage II if their fountains are efficient. They must also be shut off at night.

(6) Homeowners can wash their cars on Saturdays at home as long as they do not allow water to leave their property and run down the road.

(7) Restrictions will be declared when the 10-day average reaches the declaration level instead of the initial point that the level is reached. The new proposal also allows officials to leave the restriction after 15 days above the level instead of 30 days.

(8) Restrictions on drip irrigation and soaker hoses, however, were not addressed. I contend that the water efficient technologies are restricted more vigorously than the water use data would justify. Oh well, maybe next time!

For the entire list of proposed changes, visit the SAWS website: saws.org.

Some changes appear positive by making it easier to care for landscapes and gardens, especially if the changes do not increase the need for new water resources. If the changes in restrictions require new water resources, they may unfairly increase costs for the 70 percent of San Antonio residents who do not irrigate their lawns.

It also seems important that the impact of the proposed changes on spring flow and relationship with our Edwards Aquifer neighbors be considered. I hope that SAWS has determined the impact and will explain the results to everyone who will be concerned.

Part of the reason San Antonio’s conservation and drought management efforts have worked so well is that enough time was taken to allow everyone’s input and to understand the consequences of the strategies and rules.

Confer with your representative on the SAWS Community Conservation Committee and participate in the public hearings. Call SAWS Conservation at 704-SAVE for more information.

One of the reasons that SAWS believes it can liberalize drought restrictions is that it has nearly 100,000 acre-feet of water stored in the Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) structure in southern Bexar County. The ASR is an underground reservoir that is filled with available Edwards water in low demand times so it can be pumped back to San Antonio in high demand times.