It Takes a Village: Facilitating Public Input on Drought Management and Conservation Policy

UT CIESS Drought Symposium
October 14, 2013

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Austin Water
Exceptional Drought

- Record low inflows to Highland Lakes in 2011
- Once-per-week watering since Sept 2011
- Possible mandatory curtailment by summer 2012
- Stage 3 would virtually eliminate outdoor watering
- Public calls for earlier drought response
Green Light for Code Changes

• Projections indicate we may reach trigger for considering Stage 3 restrictions by summer 2012

• Current Stage 3 restrictions written for short-term emergencies

• Customer feedback on effects of Stage 2 restrictions on trees, landscapes and businesses

• Opportunity to clarify code language & implement new code requirements and policies
Public Input Process

• Conservation staff worked with Public Affairs office and City’s Community Engagement consultant

• Multiple avenues for input:
  – Series of 4 workshops from December 2011-March 2012
  – Online forum at SpeakUpAustin.org
  – Periodic updates to boards and commissions
  – Small group meetings with key stakeholders

• Honest, transparent approach to receiving feedback
  – No draft documents presented at first meeting!
Spreading the Word

• Identifying stakeholders
  – Opinion leaders
  – Affected industries

• Communication methods
  – Email & e-newsletters
  – Website
  – Free media
Setting the Stage

• Clear Objectives
• Stay on Topic
• Staff Interaction
• Record Input
• Offer Opportunities for Feedback on Process
December Stakeholder Meeting

- 6 table “stations” in large room with 1-2 staff
  - Irrigation restrictions
  - Car Wash requirements
  - Mandatory irrig. evaluations
  - Enforcement policies
  - Regional water issues
  - Non-irrigation regulations

- Color-coded name tags
  - Spend 10-15 min per table
  - Feedback forms available

- Feedback
  - Too loud
  - Not enough time per station
January Public Workshop

- Opening presentation for background & objectives
  - Participants grouped randomly for table exercises

- Two table exercises – “sticker voting”
  - Should we be more or less restrictive in a certain drought stage than currently?
  - How early should specific activities be restricted?

- Feedback
  - More background information needed
  - Layout & volume improved
### Conservation Measure and Drought Response Regulations

You have been given a list of potential regulations. As a group, discuss each measure and place the regulation in the column where your table believes the restriction should FIRST be enacted. Indicate which customers and irrigation types those restrictions should apply to, and which uses should be exempt from restrictions. You may write in other ideas for measures or exemptions, or modify those you were provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures Beginning in This Stage:</th>
<th>Year Round Conservation</th>
<th>Early Drought Response</th>
<th>Moderate Drought Response</th>
<th>Severe Drought Response</th>
<th>Catastrophic Drought or Emergency</th>
<th>NOT Regulated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exemptions:</td>
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**Exemptions:**

- Commercial car washes must be certified and must not operate in excess of 30% of available water.
- Landscape watering prohibited (residential).
- No ground spray systems.
- New landscaping prohibited.
- Ornamental fountains prohibited.
- Ornamental fountains allowed if recycling.
- Cosmetic power washing prohibited.
- Cosmetic power washing or pressure washing prohibited.
- Charity car washes prohibited.
- Charity car washes must be held at the efficient car wash.
- Commercial car washes operate in limited hours.
- Home car washing prohibited.
- Home car washing prohibited.
- Home car washing prohibited.
- Home car washing prohibited.
- Hand watering during limited hours.
- No midday watering - drip irrigation or sprinklers.
- No midday watering - hose-end sprinklers.
- Limitations on golf course watering with potable water.
- Commercial and nursery watering limited to drip or hand.
February Public Workshop

• Opening presentation recapping previous meetings
  – Showed graphs depicting voting results

• Table exercises
  – Did we get it right?
  – When should we consider variances?

• Feedback
  – Positive response, good communication between various types of stakeholders
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storage</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4: Catastrophic Emergency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trigger</strong>: Lake levels above 5.4 MAF</td>
<td><strong>Stage 1</strong>: Lake levels 5.4-6.0 MAF or as determined by CMO or WRD Director</td>
<td><strong>Stage 2</strong>: Lake levels 6.0-6.4 MAF or as determined by CMO</td>
<td><strong>Stage 3</strong>: Lake levels 6.4-6.8 MAF or as determined by CMO</td>
<td><strong>Stage 4</strong>: Lake levels determined by CMO or as needed to protect the regional water supply</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drought watering (11 hours total work)</td>
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<td>All outdoor irrigation prohibited (including new landscapes, golf course, etc.)</td>
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<td>Hand watering</td>
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<td><strong>Water usage prohibited</strong></td>
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<td>Facility maintenance once per 2 years</td>
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<tr>
<th>Landscaping</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4: Catastrophic Emergency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial mister may operate (100% maximum)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Core &amp; Power</th>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Stage 4: Catastrophic Emergency</th>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial mister may operate with 20-watt or smaller</td>
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<th>Innovations</th>
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<th>Stage 2</th>
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March Public Workshop

- Opening presentation recapping previous meetings
  - Depicted “final” matrix
  - Showed “You Said, We Did” response & explanations
- Group invited to read narrative code explanation
  - Actual code language pending legal review, boards & commissions
- Panel forum for questions and answers
- Feedback
  - Fewer participants, but still largely positive response
Benefits of Process

- Able to document adequate stakeholder outreach
- Able to prove public support for certain restrictions
- Industry buy-in to regulations affecting them
- Lasting contacts/advocates among stakeholders
- Improved public perception of utility staff
- Positive comments from stakeholders and Council members about public input process
Major Code Changes

- Administrative vs. court process for fines
- Conservation Stage: 2x/week watering for all customers
- New Stage 1 drought trigger (2x week/fewer hours)
- Stage 3 modified to reduce hours, not prohibit irrig.
- All car washes must be certified efficient
- Properties over 1 acre must submit irrigation evaluation every 2 years
- Home car washes prohibited in early drought stage
GPCD from 1990 to 2013

GPCD down 17% since 2006 Task Force
(5-year average FY06-FY13)
Questions?
How many bottles of water could you replace with just $1.00 worth of Austin’s drinking water?

Answer: About 2,000!

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