

Water is not a constraint to our growth!

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As our region continues to grow, I often hear, or read in the editorial section of the newspapers, comments about growth and our "lack" of water. There is frequently a reference to being in a desert climate, so there is concern about "allowing" this growth to continue. The good news is that for the Reno-Sparks metro area, primarily managed by Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA), there is little reason to be concerned about water. Actually, water availability is one of our competitive advantages as we look at continued growth and economic diversification. In fact, we could almost double the Reno-Sparks population and have no real water constraints.

So why do we have all this water when it rarely rains here in the “desert”? The obvious answer is that as the clouds rise when they approach the mountains, the Sierras get the bulk of the moisture, as opposed to the valley. What is not so obvious is that we have acquired water rights throughout the years that allow us access to much of the water, as it flows by in the Truckee River or fills mountain lakes, several which we use for storage.

According to the TMWA Water Resource Plan, we use around 82,000 acre-feet of water a year, while we currently have 145,000 acre-feet available and other water sources over time could add to this total. The current projection is that by 2035 we will need just over 100,000 acre-feet a year, far short of our current capacity. On a daily basis we average 70 million gallons a day (MGD) water use (with peak summer day use at almost 140 MGD) while we have 200 MGD available.

We are doing so well with water conservation, that even during the last significant drought, when Lake Tahoe dropped 18 inches below the natural rim, we were able to tap into our upstream reserves to ensure adequate water for the region, something we have had to do only twice in the past 25 years. Since the recent drought we have increased the size of our reserves by adding the other half of Donner Lake to our inventory.

What this means for economic development is that a company that is a low or moderate water user ***does not have to worry about access to water or unreasonable price increases in the future*** like they would in most other places in the Southwest. In short, ***“we are special”*** when it comes to water in the West, because we have plenty of water now, and for the future.

That does not mean we can be careless or irresponsible with this valuable resource. As you get out of the TMWA service area, there are potential issues with water availability. However, we will continue to discourage high water users from coming to the region, and water conservation remains essential to sustaining our resources in the years ahead. It is nice to know that even as the next drought looms around the corner, our community is postured for success, thanks to years of planning, responsible management and the proximity of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.