Editorial Opinion
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Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District

News about short water supplies and spiraling energy costs seem to dominate our state these days. The seriousness of the situation was personified by our Governor who held a special news conference to call on all Idahoans to try to conserve both water and energy. We have an excellent way to do just that right here in the Treasure Valley. It's called pressurized urban irrigation systems.

The concept is simple and effective. Pressurized urban irrigation systems use existing canal water to irrigate lawns, gardens and landscaping rather than using wells and pumps to tap our valley's magnificent, but not limitless, supply of pristine ground water.

Over decades our valley has changed from a largely rural area dotted with small towns into a major metropolitan area with thousands of homes, business and public developments.

Our valley rapidly is changing from the green of farmer's fields to the green of urban lawns and landscaping. The fuel that makes that green possible is water. Without it, our valley would be the semi-arid desert land that existed before the first settlers came.

Now try to picture just how much precious drinking water must be pumped from our aquifer on a scorching hot August day just to keep those lawns and shrubbery green. On that August day, United Water Idaho will pump upwards of 90 million gallons of ground water to meet the demand of Boise users.

How much of that is being used outside the home? Compare those 90 million gallons to the typical day in January or February when the company pumps just 21 million gallons. Imagine how much electricity it takes to run the pumps that lifts those extra 69 millions of gallons of water from hundreds of feet underground and into water lines headed for lawn and landscaping sprinklers at those thousands of homes, parks, businesses, schools and public common areas.

Typically about 1,900 kilowatt-hours of electricity can be saved for every million gallons of municipal water that does not have to be pumped from the ground. Pumping an extra 70 million gallons in one day uses enough electricity to power 109 average homes for a full month.

The potential savings in both water and energy offered by pressurized urban irrigation systems can be enormous.

It's also critical to remember that every gallon of canal water used to irrigate a lawn means a gallon of precious drinking water can be left for future generations in a regional underground aquifer it has taken nature tens of thousands of years to create.

Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District currently manages pressurized urban irrigation system systems for 163 residential subdivisions in the Ada-Canyon county area plus various parks, schools and commercial property. More are being added regularly. These systems serve nearly 6,400 residential and commercial lots and tracts of land with a total land area of more than 2,400 acres. Less than 10 years ago the District managed pressurized irrigation on just 290 tracts of land.

As our valley continues to grow, so will the demands placed on a finite resource that has been our area's lifeblood. We now must do every thing we can to make sure it does not get squandered in the process.

We at Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District firmly believe pressurized urban irrigation systems be one major answer in Idaho's efforts to conserve both water and energy. We will enthusiastically continue to pursue that strategy wherever possible in our 100 square mile service area. It's the right thing to do.