

With the summer heat, dire drought warnings, and climate change concerns, it is an excellent time to review our status as a region regarding water. I often hear or read in the newspaper's editorial section comments about growth and our "lack" of water. There is usually a reference to being in a desert climate and concern about "allowing" this growth to continue. The good news is that for the Reno-Sparks area, managed by Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA), there is little reason to be concerned about water. Water availability is one of our competitive advantages as we look at continued growth and economic prosperity.

We are experiencing a Mega-Drought in the West. A 2020 study found that the current Western drought, which started in 2000, is now a **mega-drought** — the second worst in 1,200 years. "As far as the drought goes, this is the big one, ..." says Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at the University of California Los Angeles. "By a lot of metrics, it is the most severe drought on record." However, this is not the case for our region as this is only our second year of drought. In fact, since the year 2000, Lake Tahoe - by far the largest source of supply for our region, has filled or come within six inches of filling in three of the last five years.

How much water do we have and how much do we use? TMWA's existing water resources include Truckee River water, surface water reserves stored in six upstream reservoirs, and 89 production wells. According to the 2020 TMWA Water Resource Plan, we currently use around **83,000 acre-feet of water a year, about the same amount we used 20 years ago.** Yet, the TMWA service area population has increased by nearly 50% since 2000. During these same 20 years, TMWA has added additional capacity to the system by acquiring the other half of the storage rights in Donner Lake, the acquisition of additional Truckee River water rights, and groundwater development. We now have more than 140,000 acre-feet available annually (**70 percent more than we currently use**) and expect to add even more water sources over time. Our water use in the winter averages 35 million gallons a day (MGD), while in the summer, close to 140 MGD. That means in the summer almost 100 MGD, triple our winter daily water use, goes **primarily to residential and commercial landscaping** – All those pretty green lawns.

We are well prepared for any drought. The 2020-2040 Water Resource Plan analyzed possible future water resources for the community, considered climate change, and projected adequate water resources for continued growth in the region for decades to come. TMWA modeled three scenarios to explore TMWA's water supply and operational strategies through the end of the century. The results show that **TMWA's water supply is resilient** enough to withstand both a repeat of any major drought on the Truckee River system on record, as well as, simulated climate change scenarios that include population increases projected over the next 50 years.

What does this mean for economic development? Any company that is a low or moderate water user and residents do **not have to worry about access to water or unreasonable price increases in the future** like those likely in most other places in the Southwest. In short, thanks to decades of planning and water acquisition, **"we are special"** when it comes to water in the West.

Water is still a treasured resource we must conserve. That does not mean we can be careless or irresponsible with our water. You still have watering days and are encouraged to be a reasonable water user. Additionally, as you get out of the TMWA service area, there are potential issues with water availability. However, EDAWN 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, our community is postured for success, thanks to responsible management and the proximity of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

[TMWA-WRP-2020-Final.pdf](#)