

A Perspective on Our Community

Palmer Lake water issues: A note to our citizens



Above: Even after heavy monsoon rains, Palmer Lake showed more lake bottom than water on July 16. Photo by David Futey.

Palmer Lake Town Council Water Trustee Michael Maddox issued this letter on July 16.

It seems that a few Palmer Lake residents are perplexed as to what is happening to our namesake body of water. Given that two-thirds of the U.S. is experiencing the worst drought in 24 years, and that this past year is the hottest on record since 1895 (CNN), it should be apparent to all that our disappearing lake is the cause of conditions beyond the control of the Palmer Lake Board of Trustees.

CNN reports in a July 13 story, "Drought stretches across America, threatens crops," that authorities have declared more than 1,000 counties in 26 states as natural disaster areas. As of Tuesday, July 10, 61 percent of land in the lower 48 states was experiencing drought conditions—stretching from Nevada to South Carolina. In Indiana, with water reservoirs at low levels, a mandatory water ban was issued in Indianapolis in hopes of saving an additional 25 million gallons a day.

Weather forecasters are predicting a hot, dry summer. It does not appear that drought conditions will be relieved anytime soon. Just as Palmer Lake Trustees were proactive in canceling the July 4 fireworks before the Waldo Canyon Fire, your Town Council again prioritized the health and safety of its citizens by enacting outdoor watering restrictions at the very outset of an apparent drought. No, it was not a popular decision, but one that was needed to help ensure that during July, August, and September, Palmer Lake residents would have water for drinking, cooking, and bathing.

Therein lies the dilemma for our residents who live around Palmer Lake, and many of our businesses in the historic district. Some have questioned why water cannot be transferred from the reservoir to the lake. To do so would definitely jeopardize our water supply, most likely causing shortages in the days to come. Should our water supply be protected for the health and safety of all of our citizens, or should it be utilized for mostly aesthetic purposes? The vast majority of Palmer Lake residents hold with trustees and town staff that our reservoir should be protected in order to carry us through the drought.

Neighboring towns are observing the same precautions, as attested by the following quote.

"Considering the extremely dry weather patterns and the lack of precipitation along the Front Range, water purveyors continue to work diligently to supply potable water to customers as a matter of public health and safety as the highest priority. With the cooperation of our customers, water conservation measures and demand management practices have made it possible to meet the daily demands placed on our water system."—Randy Gillette, assistant district manager, Woodmoor Water and Sanitation District No. 1.

Another neighboring community recently encountered severe water problems. With surface water and storing capabilities virtually nonexistent, they were totally dependent on their well. As the water table continues to drop, they found themselves having to go another 220 feet deeper into the well, in order to tap into water. The drop in the water table is another reason for Palmer Lake drying up.

Even with the protection of our reservoir, in the hopes it will carry the town through the drought,

Palmer Lake residents are still consuming water at alarming rates. There is much our citizens can do to help the situation. This is serious business.

It would do us well to follow these simple guidelines:

- When washing dishes by hand, don't let the water run while rinsing. Fill one sink with wash water and the other with rinse water.
- Adjust sprinklers so only your lawn is watered and not the house, sidewalk, or street.
- Run your clothes washer and dishwasher only when they are full. You can save up to 1,000 gallons a month.
- Use the garbage disposal sparingly. Compost vegetable food waste instead and save gallons every time.
- For cold drinks, keep a pitcher of water in the refrigerator instead of running the tap. This way, every drop goes down you and not the drain.
- Monitor your water bill for unusually high use. Your bill and water meter are tools that can help you discover leaks.
- Wash your fruits and vegetables in a pan of water instead of running water from the tap.
- Use a broom instead of a hose to clean your driveway and sidewalk and save water every time.
- If your shower fills a one-gallon bucket in less than 20 seconds, replace the showerhead with a water-efficient model.
- Collect the water you use for rinsing fruits and vegetables, then reuse it to water houseplants.
- When buying new appliances, consider those that offer cycle and load size adjustments. They're more water and energy efficient.
- Shorten your shower by a minute or two and you could save up to 150 gallons per month.
- Upgrade older toilets with water efficient models.
- Adjust your lawn mower to a higher setting. A taller lawn shades roots and holds soil moisture better than if it is closely clipped.
- When running a bath, plug the tub before turning the water on, then adjust the temperature as the tub fills up.

- Don't use running water to thaw food. Defrost food in the refrigerator for water efficiency and food safety.
- Grab a wrench and fix that leaky faucet. It's simple, inexpensive, and you can save 140 gallons a week.
- Reduce the amount of lawn in your yard by planting shrubs and ground covers appropriate to our region.
- Teach your children to turn off faucets tightly after each use.

The Palmer Lake Board of Trustees and staff members would like to thank each and every one of our citizens for observing these guidelines. Getting through this current drought is a team effort, with each one of us performing up to our potential. Thanks, too, for exercising understanding and patience during this difficult time, which affects us all.

Please do not hesitate to contact us, if you have any questions or concerns. We are here to serve you.

On behalf of your Board of Trustees,

Dr. Michael Maddox

Water Trustee

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