

IWVWD PRESS RELEASE – NOV. 2009
Tom Mulvihill November GM Column

The Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance

In early 2007, the Indian Wells Valley Water District Board and the Ridgecrest City Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding to write a Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance for new development. The purpose of this ordinance was to aid the management of the basin's sole water resource – our aquifer.

There are a number of compelling reasons for this cooperative effort but the most significant is this: We are using more water each year than is being replenished. Professional geologists and hydrologists who make up the Technical Advisory Committee of the Water Management Group all concur on this point, which is also supported by the AB 303 Report as well as by Brown & Caldwell's Groundwater Flow Model. These studies confirm that IWV residents use about 30,000 acre feet per year while replenishment amounts to less than 10,000 acre feet. It should be noted that Water District customers only account for approximately 30 percent of the total usage.

No one knows exactly how much water our aquifer holds or how much of that water is "brackish" – with too high a mineral content to qualify as drinking water under state and federal standards without undergoing extensive treatment. We do know that the cost of extracting and treating brackish water is about 10 times more than the water we currently provide you. This makes conserved water the cheapest water by far.

The City and the IWVWD have gone to great pains to come up with an ordinance that works for our residents. The City and the Water District hired an experienced consultant to help craft the measure. The City and the Water District then met several times with a citizen's advisory group. Eventually, a draft measure was presented to the Community Development Committee at the City. Since then a City subcommittee and Water District staff have continued refining the terms of the ordinance.

The finished product was approved by the Water Board at its regular October meeting and is awaiting final approval by the City Council.

The main points of the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance restrict the use of living turf in new commercial, industrial, institutional, and multifamily residential development; prohibit irrigation of any landscape during the day between 8 am and 8 pm from May through October; and prohibit water waste and runoff at all times. Since this ordinance will also be adopted by the Water District, both entities will have enforcement responsibility and capability.

This ordinance will not adversely affect this Valley's potential. To the contrary, Las Vegas/Henderson, Albuquerque and Mesa, Arizona all have tougher Water Efficient Landscape Ordinances and yet all have experienced phenomenal growth over the past decade. There are even studies showing that Xeriscape can enhance property values by as much as 15 percent.

Of course, the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance is just one component of prudent water management but it is a vital component. Conservation is simply the single most important and the single least costly piece of the solution to assure IWV residents a safe, clean, and affordable water supply for decades to come.

To learn more about the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance or about water conservation in general, please call the Water District at (760) 375-5086. The proposed ordinance may be viewed on the web at www.iwvwd.com. Your Indian Wells Valley Water District is here to serve you.