

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

What You Can Do to Help the Drought

Good morning and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature. This week, we'll take a look at how homeowners can curb water consumption, lower water bills, and help protect water supplies that people and animals rely on in the face of continued drought.

In college I spent a summer working on a Montana dude ranch where I spent my fair share of evenings sipping Rainier beer in the ranch's laundry room which doubled as a staff loitering area. It was here, with a bladder full of beer, that I first heard the instruction, "It it's yellow, let it mellow, if it's brown, flush it down," uttered by a co-worker every time one of us headed off to relieve ourselves, a water conservation adage as applicable in the current day south as it ever is in the arid west.

Despite some recent rainfall, we're still in the grips of a tremendous drought. At a recent meeting of western North Carolina community leaders, a National Weather Service meteorologist forecasted a dry winter, with the first, though unguaranteed, chance of relief coming next spring. Beyond that, he wouldn't venture to forecast, citing the unpredictable nature of tropical activity, which has a tremendous influence on summer weather across the southeast.

During the warmer months of the year, you may have quit washing your car, or watering your lawn, but as winter sets in, let's focus on indoor water conservation. One of the simplest steps we can take is to just turn off the faucet. You don't have to go so far as to limit your flushes, but you could. We can take shorter showers, take fewer showers, wait until the dishwasher is full before running it, or until you have a full load to wash clothes.

As it comes time to replace appliances like dishwashers and washing machines, look for models that use less water. You can purchase low-flow shower heads. You can purchase showerheads that allow you to temporarily turn off flow while you lather up. Many Southern Appalachian houses are older and don't have low-flow toilets – you can replace your toilet, or put in a toilet dam or a simple bottle of water into your current toilet, limiting the amount of water needed to fill the tank.

And finally, keep your eye out for the fruits of innovation and imagination that help conserve water. For our home, we found a toilet tank lid that doubles as a wash basin. With each flush, freshwater flows out a spout on the lid into a tiny sink, allowing you to wash your hands. The water then goes down the sink drain and fills up the tank before moving into the toilet bowl with the next flush.

All this applies to people who get their water from wells also. There isn't a limitless supply of groundwater and more people tapping into subterranean supplies makes groundwater increasingly vulnerable.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.