

 Virtual **H₂O** Breakfast**Wednesday March 31, 2021**

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Reducing Outdoor Irrigation: A Regional Call to Action

Kootenai County's population growth over the Spokane Valley Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer is projected to increase over 80% by 2045, and Spokane County's by over 50%. These are big numbers, especially when you recognize our region's sole source aquifer is already meeting the needs of over 500,000 people.

The 2015 drought gave us a sneak preview of the future if water conservation measures aren't taken and the effects of climate change heighten. Private well owners in Coeur d'Alene, for example, had to go to the city and other purveyors to purchase water.

Join Terry Pickel, City of Coeur d'Alene Water Department Director and Idaho Washington Aquifer Collaborative (IWAC) president, at the Virtual H2O Breakfast to hear him sketch out how what we do today can create a future where the region can have its water and drink it too.

IWAC, a group of Idaho and Washington purveyors (the people that deliver water to homes and businesses through public water systems) has set a goal of achieving 70% irrigation efficiency in our communities. "It sounds like a stretch," said Terry, "but it's not. For new homes and those with sprinkler systems being updated, the technology is there to easily achieve the goal." As proof, he notes that, on average, 50% of

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water used for irrigation is wasted due to inefficient systems causing needless evaporation and runoff.

He points to technologies like MP (matched precipitation) rotator sprinkler heads that provide an even distribution and spray pattern, and whose pressure can be adjusted to get just the right size droplets to maximize efficiency. "Do things like that, start to install smart meters and incentivize homeowners to remove some turf to further reduce water consumption, and you'd be amazed what can be accomplished."

Terry will be sharing some of these strategies and how they're being applied in Coeur d'Alene at the H2O breakfast. And he's excited to do so. "Here's a visual for you," said Terry. "Just a 30% efficiency gain in Spokane County over the SVRP could supply enough water to the City of Coeur d'Alene for three and a half years."

The challenge is that water in our communities is very inexpensive. In addition, there are no water efficient landscape and permit requirements for new or rehabilitated residential irrigation systems. So the incentive structure is lacking.

Without calling for mandatory action, IWAC has begun trying to close this gap by developing the publication "Efficient Irrigation & Design Landscape Standards." The goal is to encourage governments and the landscape community to voluntarily adopt best practices for water conservation.

"We're asking residents and businesses to unleash the power of water conservation and stewardship," said Terry. "If we don't succeed with voluntary actions, the types of mandates you see in California, Arizona and Florida will eventually take root here. None of us want that."

Register now to learn more at the Virtual H2O Breakfast.

The Spokane River Forum is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that creates materials, events and activities that promote sustaining a healthy river system while meeting the needs of a growing population.