

 Virtual **H<sub>2</sub>O** Breakfast**Wednesday March 31, 2021****Making Water Second Nature: The City of Spokane's Sustainability Vision**

"The greenest drop of water," said Cadie Olsen, the City of Spokane's Director of Sustainability, "is the one not used." Why? "Our goal is to achieve a triple bottom line win to secure the future for our city."

[Register now](#) for the Virtual H2O Breakfast to join Cadie as she talks water and the city's future. [Click here](#) for details and agenda with speakers and topics.

Cadie defines a triple bottom line win as 1) keep ratepayer costs low and fair by avoiding the need to drill new wells and build new infrastructure to support additional water supply; 2) protect the environment by keeping the aquifer and river flows plentiful; and 3) support a treasured quality of life for current residents while attracting new talent and entrepreneurship to the community.

Achieving the triple bottom line starts with acknowledging the water thirst of the city and region. Averaging 235 gallons a day, the United States Geological Survey estimates county residents use more than 2.5 times more water than the average American.

"We grew up loving our green lawns and considered water feeding our aquifer inexhaustible," said Guy Gregory, a hydrogeologist and Forum Board member. "In 2007, the Bi-State model estimated If we grew 15% and didn't change our use patterns, river flows could drop by as much as 15 cubic feet per second during the summer. But, if we conserve, river flows could actually

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increase.”

Cadie and Guy both see reducing summertime use as priority one. That’s when the weather is hot and dry, water use triples to keep lawns green, and the aquifer receives the least recharge from surrounding mountains and lakes. “Water demand over the summer,” notes Guy, “looks like a camel’s hump on a hydrograph as it rises with the heat and then falls when temperatures begin to cool.”

The City’s stewardship strategies revolve around twin goals: lowering the base of that camel’s hump year-round and, most importantly, shaving off the peak of that summer hump when the river needs water the most.

Strategically, the city is leading by modeling and doing. Cadie ticks off some successes:

- Revising the city’s water consumption tiers for residential customers, incentivizing them to stay below median summertime usage and making lifeline uses more affordable. Commercial water use pricing tiers are under evaluation this year.
- Launching rebates and incentives to install water saving devices inside your house (think toilets and showerheads) and outside your house (smart timers and sprinkler nozzles). For instance, fixing a broken sprinkler can save 25,000 gallons in 6 months!
- Expanding the popular SpokaneScape program, where the city pays you to replace thirsty turf with beautiful drought tolerant plants that use little to no irrigation.
- Reducing the city’s own water consumption. The Parks and Water Departments are leading by example through converting turf to naturalized beauty, test-driving better irrigation design standards, and installing smart meters which allow managers to inventory the water they are using. At Parks and Recreation, for instance, \$2.5 million was spent to upgrade the irrigation at Indian Canyon Golf Course, saving about 16 million gallons of water annually. A similar upgrade is under way at Esmeralda Golf Course.
- Using new technologies to identify leaks and other potential problems in the city’s aging water pipes, called system losses. Pipe divers, satellite imaging, and smart meters will provide the data needed to make a difference.

“It all adds up,” said Cadie. “and it’s also going high tech. The water department has a water consumption dashboard, and they’re installing smart meters at homes and businesses as fast as they can. That let’s both the city and customer optimize the amount, where

and when of water use. Knowledge is power.”

Water, however, is just one part of the city’s larger sustainability vision. The triple bottom line approach is also being used to leverage the city’s hydropower and waste to energy plants to achieve being a net zero user of electricity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve the health of the Spokane River by completing a \$350 million investment in upgrades to reduce overflow from combined sewers and vastly improve treatment at the Riverside Park Water Reclamation Facility.

Cadie sees it all as “one urban ecosystem. When we mimic how nature restores, regulates and cleans itself, we know we’re reaching maximum efficiency. ”

[Register now](#) to learn more at the 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.**