

Conservation and Our Community

Unless you live at the bottom of the sea, you've seen the wave of headlines about the water crisis in California and the Western U.S. in general. The situation is pretty grim. I offer my sympathies to the communities and agencies that must confront the crisis and create the solutions for it. It won't get resolved overnight, but let's hope for relief sooner rather than later.

Let's also be thankful that the situation in Chapel Hill and Carrboro is not making headlines.

First, I want to assure OWASA customers and stakeholders that our local water supplies here are in excellent shape this year. There is no reason to be anxious. In fact, our reservoirs are **99% full** today. I write primarily to highlight one of the most important reasons for this: our community has truly stepped up its commitment to water conservation over the past 15 years.

Let me share some amazing statistics to demonstrate this. If you've lived here since 1991, you couldn't have missed the new homes, buildings, and vehicle traffic in Chapel Hill and Carrboro. The number of customers OWASA serves has grown more than **65%** in these **24 years**. For the first eight years of that stretch, our community's water consumption closely tracked the growth in OWASA customers. Then, in 2000, the consumption pattern took a sharp turn: more and more customers, yet less and less consumption.

Today, our community is consuming **LESS** water than we consumed in 1991! This is a headline that deserves to stand next to the headlines about California. Is this **#ThrowbackThursday**? Let's give a big shout-out to community members like you for their steady commitment to conservation.

Now, you never know when the next drought will begin here and how long it might last. Let's turn to what we can learn from the California experiences as well as our own.



Our lakes were **100% full** from February 20, 2015 until mid-May.

CONTACT US

Orange Water and Sewer Authority
400 Jones Ferry Road
Carrboro, NC 27510

Customer Service phone and e-mail:
919.537.4343
customerinquiries@owasa.org

Office Hours:
8 AM to 5 PM, Monday-Friday

Emergencies and Main Office phone:
919.968.4421

www.owasa.org; info@owasa.org

One of OWASA's seven strategic initiatives is to update our long-range water supply plan to make sure we have a reliable supply of water despite an uncertain future. When we say "long range," we mean looking out 50 years!

Conservation is and will remain the first line of defense for thriving with finite water resources, so keep up the great work.

But the desperate situation in California and our own experiences with past droughts point out the real need to have adequate backup water resources—an insurance policy—in case of severe drought.

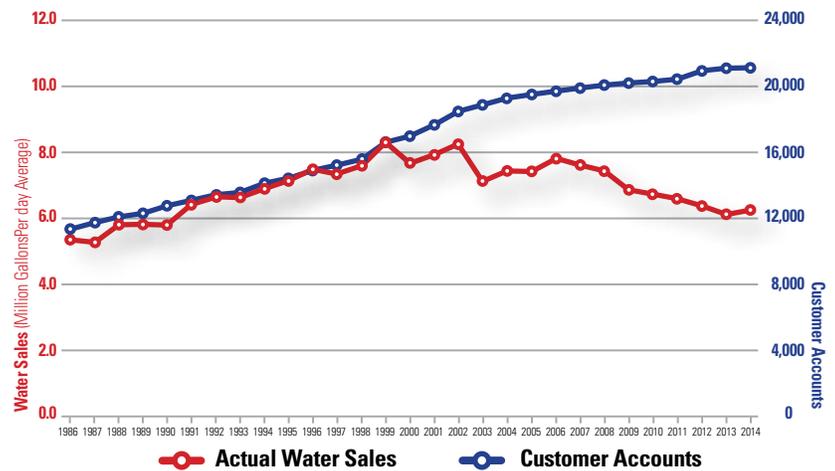
This is why our Board and staff members submitted an application to maintain our community's allocation of **Jordan Lake** water resources as a backup to the **Cane Creek** and **University Lake** reservoirs. In the course of updating the water supply plan, we will explore a wide range of other supply and demand management options, too.

Rate increases are part of the headlines in California, too. Water utilities have very high fixed costs, so lower consumption inevitably leads to higher rates per gallon to compensate for revenue gaps. The headlines in California tell us to expect double-digit percentage rate increases there. Some customers complain that they are asked to conserve and then penalized for doing so.

In my opinion, however, the headlines and stories often mislead us. Somewhere in history, the world decided that water should be priced as an ordinary commodity, by the gallon. Imagine instead if the world had decided to look at water as a service, rather than a widget. I encourage you to look at water as a service and consider what your final monthly bill looks like for access to high-quality water *in the amounts you need*.

You see, when the community conserves, OWASA's and other utilities' total costs don't go up, they actually go down slightly. For example, we use less energy to run our pumps and less chemicals to treat our water and wastewater. (The planet thanks you, again.) That means we don't need to collect more revenue in total. Plus, long-term costs run lower because we defer expansion of reservoirs, water treatment facilities, and wastewater treatment facilities. Our average bills don't need to go up because of conservation.

OWASA — Water Sales and Accounts (1986 - 2014)



But, yes, with fewer gallons consumed, the rate per gallon often goes up. And, unfortunately, if your household doesn't or can't keep pace with conservation of the community, your monthly bill might be one that goes up while others see steady or even lower bills. If you are looking for ideas about conservation and reducing your monthly bill, I encourage you to consult the team at OWASA or the website for conservation ideas and best practices.

Fortunately for OWASA customers, we've been able to avoid increases in monthly rates for 3 years running. The **OWASA Board of Directors** will be considering a scenario with no increase in monthly rates for a fourth year. This is because of responsible cost management and investments, modest inflation, proactive financial planning, and rate adjustments made in earlier years in response to conservation. Importantly, we are also able to push out the time horizon for new capacity because of conservation.

Thank you. We truly value your conservation efforts. We welcome your thoughts on this and all topics of interest, and we commit to keeping you engaged in planning our future.



Sincerely,

John Young,
Chair, Board of Directors,
Orange Water and Sewer Authority

Español

Este boletín informativo contiene información sobre los servicios de agua y alcantarillado de **OWASA**. Para obtener una traducción, por favor llame al **919.537.4221** o mande un correo electrónico a: info@owasa.org. ¡Muchas gracias!