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Guest Opinion: Ounces of prevention in Wyoming drought

By **LEANNE STEVENSON**

Parts of Wyoming have been suffering from a serious lack of moisture for more than seven years, and there seems to be no relief in sight.

Almost half of the state - 38.3 percent - is now in severe drought, according to a recent U.S. Drought Monitor Report. Nearly 10 percent of the state's parched landscape is considered to be in extreme drought.

So, what can we do about it?

We can do a better job conserving the water that we have to reduce demand on our already stretched system.

Americans use about 341 billion gallons of tap water every day. An average single-family home uses 101 gallons per person per day for indoor and outdoor use.

In Wyoming, our numbers are estimated to be a little worse. The State Engineer's Office estimates that each person uses 223 gallons per day.

The city of Cheyenne's per capita per day use is just slightly higher than the average, but has decreased since 2002 through progressive conservation efforts.

But with just a few small, thoughtful changes in lifestyle and activities, all of us could cut down on water waste and conserve our precious water supply. Many of these conservation measures not only save water but can save

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money and energy, too.

Here are five easy tips from the Web site [www.h2ouse.org](http://www.h2ouse.org).

- Stop leaks. Check your indoor appliances and devices for leaks. Many silent leaks allow water and your money to go down the drain. Studies have shown that homes can waste more than 10 percent due to leaky appliances. Another big water waster can be leaks in your irrigation system. Fix irrigation system leaks quickly and check for water in the gutters or mud puddles.

Inspect your sprinklers and drip sprayers regularly for leaks during the daytime, since the optimal time to water is in the nighttime hours when you cannot observe leaks. In older irrigation systems, more than 50 percent of the water used can be lost to leaks.

- Replace your old toilet, the largest water user in your home. If your home was built before 1992 and the toilet has never been replaced, it is likely that you do not have a water-efficient, 1.6-gallon-per-flush toilet. You can check the date stamp inside the toilet by lifting the lid and looking at the back of the toilet at the manufacturer's imprint of the make, model and date of manufacture.

- Replace your clothes washer, the second largest water user in your home. Energy Star rated washers that also have a water factor at or lower than 9.5 use 35 to 50 percent less water and 50 percent less energy per load. This saves you money on both your water and energy bills.

- Plant the right plants with proper landscape design and irrigation. Whether you are putting in a new landscape or slowly changing the current landscaping at your home, select plants that are appropriate for your local climate conditions. Having a yard with 100 percent lawn turf area in a dry climate uses significant amounts of water. Consider xeriscaping or wildscaping with low-water, native plant material.

- Water only what your plants need. Most water is wasted in your garden by watering when plants do not need it, or in lack of maintenance of the irrigation system. Be attentive if you are manually watering by setting your oven timer or some other reminder to move the water promptly. Make sure your irrigation controller has a rain shutoff device and that it is appropriately scheduled. Most water is wasted in months prior to or just after the rainy season, when intermittent rains

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occur and the landscape doesn't need irrigating.

Stop a drip. Save a drop. Conserve water.

Leanne Stevenson, manager of the Natural Resources and Policy Division of the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, co-chairs the Governor's Drought Task Force.

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Wyoming, and its surrounding neighbors, could do a lot more to prevent water waste by limiting development like gated subdivisions. Those greedy jackals who build large, unneeded subdivisions with their acres of lawns and golf courses do nothing to help prevent the water shortage. It seems every county and city cant get enough property tax revenue from the rich transplants. It was once said to " Buy land, they dont make it anymore " but not every square inch.

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