

Mountain Water, Where Does It Come From?

Water, our elixir of life, which we often take for granted, must be absorbed regularly during the day to balance our electrolyte levels so we can maintain our abilities to learn. All other drinks are digested as food, but clear uncontaminated water ensures that the synapses in our brain cells can fire effectively to create balance in our body systems. In addition, a steady flow of water all day long is important to release the toxins in our bodies to maintain health.

Where does this healthy flow of water come from in our mountain areas? Many of us have wells that seem to get drier each year as there is more and more depletion of the ground water. Others, just as residents in the city tap into the water districts.

According to Jerry Schulte, general manager of the Evergreen Metropolitan District, water is a complex issue in the mountains. Jerry has seen the Evergreen Metropolitan District grow from a small area at the water and treatment facility downtown to its present administrative building on Stagecoach Blvd. He believes we are a conservation minded community in our use of water. For example, he says, mountain community residents use an average of 7600 gallons of water each month as compared to the average household in Denver which will use twice that much.

The Evergreen Metro district is the mother district of eight other water and sanitation districts which all receive their water through the Evergreen district. These include the El Rancho district which was formed 3 years ago to serve the commercial development there. Others are the Bergan Park Metro, the West Jefferson (Hiwan) Wah Keeney, Evergreen Central which includes Tanoa and El Pinal, Evergreen Metro, the Upper Bear district which goes as far as Troutdale and the Kittredge Water and Sanitation district which covers the platted area of the town of Kittredge.

The boundaries of these areas are fixed and no new territory can be added to them. Sixty five hundred taps are allocated to these districts. To date 4800 have been issued. Schulte believes we have enough taps to last for 20 -25 years based on the average of 50 -100 being issued per year. These taps, he said, are issued to all new homes regardless of what water district they are in, but they must fall within the water district, otherwise they will have to drill a well. The total amount of taps available was determined by the water rights, (the right to take water out of stream), balanced with the historic amounts of water. The historic amounts of water are based on a benchmark established in the dry years. Though a yearly average may be 30 gallons per cubic meter, the dry years may be only 3-8 gallons. This flow amount establishes the amount of water taps available to the districts.

For the past eighty years, the measurement has been taken at the Morrison Gage, located about 8 miles downstream from Bear Creek at the bridge in Evergreen. To compare readings, another measurement is taken above the dam at the end of the wooden walkway into the Lake House area.

Three years ago, we were in a drought season and many of us can remember the uproar about lawns being watered while others had no water. Schulte agreed that one of the primary problems then was the inability of the plant to let enough water out into the system. With the upgrading of the facilities and the change in water rates this is no longer a problem. At that time, heavy water users used over 20,000 gallons per month to keep their lawns green. New rates were established and now anything over 15,000 gallon is billed at \$5.00 per thousand compared with the \$2.00 rate for 9,000 gallons and under and \$2.50 per thousand up to 15,000 gallons. This increase Schulte said, dropped the high water usage to 12,000 gallons per month

The primary problem in high water usage other than irrigation is leaky toilets. A leaky toilet can use 15,000 gallons per month. Schulte advises homeowners to regularly check the drain tanks and if necessary use a dye test to determine if the toilet is leaking from the tank into the bowl. This is an easy way to drop your water usage and your water bill.

Dr. Joan Spalding is a member of the Commercial Arborists Association and an educational consultant.