

One View: Region's water future has never been more secure

Geno Martini 8:13 a.m. PDT May 6, 2016



Geno Martini(Photo: Submitted)

As summer approaches, many people are wondering about the status of our water supply. We had a moderate recovery this winter and spring thanks to numerous storms. The good news is that we do not anticipate using our upstream reserves this year, meaning Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) will not be asking our customers for any additional conservation. Please continue to use water responsibly, but rest assured, we are saving all the water that we are legally permitted to store in our upstream reservoirs.

During last summer and fall, following the driest winter on record, TMWA used only 40 percent of our upstream reserves. Thanks goes out to the community for responding so well to our request for a 10 percent reduction in water use. That water-savings goal was nearly doubled, with our customers reducing their use by nearly 20 percent. We stored that saved water in upstream reservoirs. In addition, the long-anticipated Truckee River Operating Agreement (TROA) went into operation last December. For the first time ever, TROA allows us to store water in upstream reservoirs during the winter. This means we will go into this summer with about 65 percent more upstream reserves than we had going into last summer, or about 44,000 acre feet (over 14 billion gallons). If you would like to check out the status of our upstream reserves, please visit tmwa.com/reserves.

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Our water future has never been more secure than it is today. However, those of us currently in the water business can't take all of the credit, as smart management of our water resources started decades ago when our predecessor purchased Independence Lake in the 1930s. Generations of long-term planning for dry conditions is what makes us different from many communities in the West who are still suffering water supply shortages. Living in the desert requires the need to plan ahead. Careful management of our water supply has been passed down from generation to generation and is the major reason why our region's water system is different and difficult to compare to other systems.

TROA, implemented late last year after nearly 30 years of planning, negotiation and legal challenges, brings immense benefits to the Truckee Meadows water supply. This is an absolute game-changer for our region. During droughts, TMWA now has the legal right to hold back and store more drought reserves in upstream reservoirs than ever before. Over time, our upstream drought storage will nearly triple TMWA's previous storage capacity. Credit must be given to Senator Harry Reid, who convened the major parties on the Truckee River and started discussions on how to change the operation of the river and provide multiple benefits for all river users. Today, TROA is the biggest and most important piece of TMWA's Water Resource Plan. View the entire plan at tmwa.com/plan.



The Truckee River Operating Agreement was finalized in 2015 after 27 years of effort. (Photo: Getty Images)

In addition to the crucial and timely implementation of TROA, we are also proud to announce that the purchase of additional storage rights in Donner Lake is complete. The Truckee Carson Irrigation District recently sold their half of the Donner Lake water right to TMWA. This will enhance our community's water resource portfolio and further expand our ability to store water upstream for use during droughts.

Another important piece of TMWA's water supply program is to maximize the use of Truckee River water when it is available and reduce pumping of groundwater wells. During the winter months we turn off as many groundwater wells as possible and serve customers with treated surface (river) water. In addition, we also store treated surface water in underground aquifers

during the winter months for use during droughts. TMWA has recharged 21 wells over the past seven months, storing nearly 887 million gallons of water underground. We are also in the process of expanding this program as 26 additional wells are being evaluated that could be added to our aquifer storage and recovery program.

All these things add up to a very robust and resilient system that will provide a reliable water supply to our community even during extreme droughts. We ask you to please continue to use our precious resource responsibly and enjoy the summer.

Geno Martini is Mayor of Sparks and the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Truckee Meadows Water Authority

Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) is a not-for-profit water utility, overseen by elected officials from Reno, Sparks and Washoe County. TMWA employs a highly skilled team who ensure the treatment, delivery and availability of high-quality drinking water around the clock for more than 385,000 residents of the Truckee Meadows.

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