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Steamboat Pilot

To the last drop

Water district makes push for conservation efforts

By [Mike Lawrence](#)

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — Water use in Steamboat Springs triples during the summer, and the Mount Werner Water and Sanitation District is asking local hotels to promote conservation efforts such as reusing towels and linens.

Water District manager Jay Gallagher said six Steamboat lodging facilities are participating in the program.

The district has distributed laminated cards, sponsored by the environmental group "Project Planet," that hotels can place in rooms and hang on doorknobs to inform guests.

"We were excited to learn about this phase of the district's water conservation campaign," said Jay Wetzler, owner of the Steamboat Springs Super 8 Motel and the Bunkhouse Lodge. "It just makes a lot of sense."

District statistics show that for the past five years, water use in Steamboat has risen from about 60 million gallons a month during the fall and winter to as many as 180 million gallons a month in mid-summer.

The district's water treatment plant on Clearwater Trail can treat about 6 million gallons of water a day for use across Steamboat, Gallagher said.

The district also can treat 1.7 million gallons a day at small plants along the Yampa River south of downtown.

While most of the summer boost in water usage is a result of outdoor activities such as watering lawns and washing cars, Gallagher said, the district is well aware of how Steamboat's growing summer tourism industry and development can impact water supplies.

"These peaks are why we have to have extra capacity," Gallagher said. "We have to build the church for Easter Sunday."

Easter Sunday could be coming soon. The district's total water use in 2005 was about 900 million gallons, Gallagher said.

He expects annual water use in Steamboat to "easily" exceed 1 billion gallons within five to 10 years.

Having the capacity to treat and filter that water is more of a problem than water supply, Gallagher said.

Fish Creek Reservoir holds about 8,000 acre-feet of water.

The treatment plant "captures" only about 4,200 acre-feet a year. One acre-foot equals about 326,000 gallons.

Gallagher said that in the hot, dry summer of 2003, the treatment plant "pushed its capacity" for filtering enough water to supply Steamboat.

This winter, the plant will construct two new filtering tanks.

There is empty land adjacent to the filtering tanks where more can be constructed, possibly in 2010, Gallagher said.

"The plant is plumbed to handle 12 million gallons a day," Gallagher said. "This will give us a little more breathing room."

In the meantime, Gallagher stressed the importance of conserving water during the hot summer months.

"This is an important message," Gallagher said. "A lot of us use water in a discretionary fashion. Our (annual) water usage is totally dependent on the summer."