

Awhile back I sat for four long hours as the Spokane City council decided on a proposal to limit summer water usage. In the end it was decided to implement very strict watering restrictions.

Actually, it was apparent that this had been decided long before the vote. Citizens were only informed a few days before the vote was even going to take place. The information was given out in such a way as to gloss over the bottom line. The entire process felt disingenuous.

First, this has nothing to do with a potential lack of water. We sit on top of a 10-trillion gallon aquifer. If our aquifer never replenished itself (which it does), we have 270 years of water available. That's longer than our country has existed. We have more water than we can imagine. The stated reason for such drastic measures, pardon the pun, doesn't hold water.

It ends up being about water flow in the Spokane River. The Spokane River is precious. Personally, my relationship with the river has been close for over 60 years. I learned to skip rocks on it when I was 4. When my son died, it's the first place I went. For over 10 years our family lived on the river. We are the River City, but the council's goal here is unrealistic. The river flow amount set by the council won't be attainable. It seems that this fact was ignored by the council members who pushed this through.

Here is how it works. If river flow drops below the number set by the council, a drought can be announced. Then either the council or the mayor can declare the drought. The bottom line is that you would not be allowed to water more than two days a week from that point until October 1.

The goal that the five council members set for river flow has only been attained five times in the last 30 years. If we couldn't hit this number when Spokane and surrounding areas were much smaller, how do we do it now? We won't, and the council members who voted for it must know that.

So this isn't a water conservation measure, it's an anti-lawn-at-your-house measure (more on that later).

If you have been aware of these water restrictions at all, I bet you only heard about the watering every other day rule or the watering only at night rule. We may be able to maintain turf (lawn) with those restrictions, but two days a week just won't cut it (sorry, another pun) during the summer.

Lawns in North Spokane won't have a chance. Deep watering does not work in sand, and that's 90% of North Spokane. The South Hill would also suffer, and in a hot summer like 2021, people will definitely lose turf grass, not to mention what it could do to trees, shrubs, and flowers.

It seems that these five members of the council are basically anti-lawn. Which is weird because lawns are excellent at sequestering carbon. Lawns are one the best filters for groundwater. Lawns protect our aquifer. Lawns cool the area around our homes. Lawns create oxygen. Oh, but there is more. A well-maintained landscape around houses lowers the chance of break-ins and crime in general. These facts didn't fit into the plans of the majority of council members.

Another thing: parks, golf courses, and schools can water as they see fit. Homeowners, property tax payers, can't.

Two council members voted against these measures. The Mayor vetoed it, and most people, when they hear what actually was passed, are against this. That didn't stop five elected officials from passing this against majority opinion.

Our roads could use work; crime is up; homelessness is at an all-time high; quality of life is down in our city, and these individuals think watering is the BIG problem and should be made a crime. It feels like they have lost the plot. In the history of the West, water rights have been literally fought over. Why? Because invariably powerful groups try to take them away. It's happening again.

Next summer your neighbors will be encouraged to call authorities on you if you water more than these men and women deem necessary. First a warning, then a fine. How does any of this make Spokane better? It doesn't!

I have included the contacts for Council President Beggs and the four other council members who are telling us what we can and can't do with our water, our homes, and our well-being. It is an elected official's responsibility to listen to those they represent, so if you want to share your thoughts with them on these restrictions in a respectful way, I encourage you to do so! Personally, I will choose Dr. King's and Gandhi's approach—civil disobedience. My hope is enough of us will say enough.

If you have any thoughts or questions, feel free to contact me.

Thanks,
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