

Developers could use new approach to water

Although some people in development-related businesses are complaining, no one should blame the Santa Fe City Council for imposing a Stage 3 water alert. Our two reservoirs (which account for 40 percent of our water supply) are 80 percent empty. It would have been irresponsible for the Council not to administer the only powers it currently has for curtailing the effects of the drought.

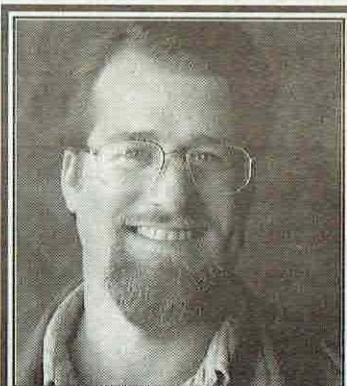
Unfortunately, Stage 3 is just a stopgap measure. If the 1996 drought provides us with any lessons, one is that when we get normal moisture, higher consumption soon follows. The reason for this is that we do not see the existing alternative water sources that stare us in the face everyday. We need a new approach to water, one that first helps us see, and then makes it easy for us to use, all of the water that we unconsciously waste as modern Americans living in an arid land.

One of the skills that permaculture tries to help hone

is our power of observation. We encourage people to observe a piece of property. With no preconceived notions, we focus on determining basic facts. Where is it warm? Where is it windy? Where is it noisy?

A step up from that regime is to concentrate on a particular type of energy flow such as water. Take a moment to walk around your home and yard. Observe all of the places where water flows. Inside you'll find sinks, showers, tubs, toilets and perhaps a washing machine. Outside you'll discover canales or downspouts, driveway edges, bottoms of slopes and arroyos, hose bibs, perhaps a drip irrigation or pop-up spray system.

Combining these observations with basic permaculture principles, we discover that there is a whole new world of resources. The drains in our sinks, tubs and washing machines can contribute nutrient-rich graywater for use in landscaping. Downspouts, canales and roof edges are vast,



**Permaculture
in practice**
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untapped resources for harvesting water. Even slopes and the bottoms of arroyos can be seen as ideal places to slow down the flow of our most precious resource.

Appropriate planting must also be addressed in our new approach. Not only Kentucky bluegrass, but less-thirsty fescue lawns (in the vast majority of cases) should be replaced with native buffalograss and blue grama that need very

little, if any, irrigation once established. From an extremist's perspective (which may one day be mainstream), the only flora given supplemental water are plants and trees which provide food, shade, wind protection and other necessities.

How, then, should we begin this new approach, which amounts to nothing less than a major paradigm shift?

Out of a basic instinct for self-preservation, it is the development industry (and all its related suppliers, contractors, subcontractors, marketers and bureaucrats) that needs to lead the way. That there is a growing sentiment in the Santa Fe area that development should cease due to our lack of water. The only way to prevent this sentiment from spreading is to see water in this new way.

It's time to sink or swim. We no longer have the luxury of merely talking about graywater recycling, rainwater catchment and appropriate planting. The private

and public sectors must work together to break down existing regulatory barriers while simultaneously creating incentives for applying these simple, necessary techniques.

This new approach needs visionaries at the city, county and state levels who see every square foot of every rooftop as a resource. Architects, engineers, builders, plumbers and landscapers must begin to see sinks, showers, canales and downspouts as ways of increasing a property's value. And conscious Realtors will also be needed to promote the benefits of this new approach.

As these changes take place, landowners will begin to recognize the alternatives that exist. The market will then be driven toward water wisdom.

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