Summer peaks show EPWater’s resilience

El Paso Water’s management of water resources is working, and we have proof.

Despite reaching a peak of 170 million gallons in July—a high EPWater hasn’t seen in decades—we are happy to report that we soundly met the demand by employing our strong portfolio of resources. This is the outcome of careful investment over the years that has resulted in a sustainable and resilient water supply for our customers.

Our community’s river water supply is dependent on Elephant Butte Reservoir, which sometimes accounts for half our water supply. We were fortunate to receive a nearly full share of Rio Grande water this year. For decades, we have been planning and preparing for the years when we may not.

How we do it

We have built an innovative portfolio of water resources that includes desalination, water reuse and conservation. When other sources are not available, our desalination and reuse projects fill the gap to keep faucets flowing. EPWater also supplements our water supply by responsibly pumping from our wells to meet demand.

The Kay Bailey Hutchison Desalination Plant, the largest inland desalination plant in the world, has played a pivotal role in building our resiliency. The plant has risen to the occasion in both freeze and drought, helping to prevent water restrictions and potential water shortages.

As the mercury rises, water consumption goes up as well. This year had the added component of many El Pasoans working from home because of the pandemic and a late monsoon season. Thankfully, El Paso is a city where conservation is a comfortable way of life. We are grateful for our community’s support of more than 30 years and count conservation as one of our many successful strategies.

For many years, water reuse has also been an effective tool in water management. EPWater has been treating wastewater to drinking water standards and recharging the Hueco Bolson aquifer for 30 years at the Fred Hervey Water Reclamation Plant. This helps stabilize levels in the aquifer, which is pumped more in times of river drought.

Preparing for the future

In anticipation of a limited river water supply next year, the Public Service Board recently approved a Drought Resolution, which allows EPWater to expedite purchasing and equipment installation for drought relief services. The utility is currently drilling six wells, which under the resolution will be equipped and expedited into service, adding 7.5 million more gallons to the overall daily supply. Project completion is scheduled for June.

Our preparation is necessary because drought is a reality of life in the Southwest. Our water portfolio is diverse, and we are guided by the environment we live in to make sure that we cover all the bases.

Our planning process spans 50 years into the future. We will further diversify our water sources to include:

- Advanced Water Purification, which will transform treated wastewater into fresh drinking water. Instead of putting clean, purified water into the ground, we are designing a facility that will send it straight to our customers’ taps.
- Expanding desalination to draw on vast brackish portions of the aquifer.
- Importing water from the aquifer beneath Dell City. These new water sources will enable our city to thrive well into the future.
- Because of years of investment and responsibly managing our water sources, we are charting a path of long-term sustainability. EPWater wants to assure our customers that we have many reliable options.