



The Las Vegas Water Success Story

Desert homes in Las Vegas use far less water than other cities with a similar climate.

Sustained water conservation efforts are driving water use rates down year-over-year in many cities. Between 2002 and 2023, total metro water uses in Las Vegas decreased by 42% while the population increased by 52%. Conservation efforts have helped the community reduce its per capita water use (gpcd) by 58% during this time, which is reported to be 89 gpcd for 2023. Until Las Vegas did it, no one thought it could be done – conventional wisdom has held that water consumption always goes up with population growth.

Las Vegas' conservation success story did not happen by accident. It was the result of having a dry climate; an extremely low Colorado River water allocation under the 1922 Compact; and an aspiration to grow into a significant Western US city with a thriving, largely tourism-based economy. Almost 30 years ago, looming metro region water shortages forced the elected city and county officials to become serious about water conservation.

These trend-breaking reductions in water use were accomplished in part through significant capital water infrastructure projects like the treatment and return of all residential/indoor wastewater to Lake Mead. Residents were also incentivized to conserve water through rebates to tear out water-guzzling grass and landscape, replacing it with xeriscape watered

only by drip irrigation; reduce new pool sizes; restrict outdoor water features. These are just a few examples of a slate of water conservation measures implemented methodically by elected officials and the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA).

This water success story also took leadership and political resolve; partnering with the local hotels, casinos, and business community; calculated risk-taking; some new technology development and application, creative strategic and tactical thinking; persistence; and a lot of money (of which there was a significant return on investment). However, none of this success could be realized without the support of the public. After a huge public education effort, Las Vegas residents internalized the message that water conservation is critical or else the city would face dire consequences. This resulted in a public “water conservation culture” that has a momentum of its own now in reducing current water usage in Las Vegas.

Additional Resources: <https://www.snwa.com/>