

U.S. water usage lowest in decades

By Michael Muskal, Los Angeles Times

Americans recently passed a milestone when federal officials reported that water use across the nation had reached its lowest level in more than 45 years: good news for the environment, great news in times of drought and a major victory for conservation.

What was surprising in the U.S. Geological Survey report released last week was how little of the 13 percent decline in national water usage was due to the public cutting back.

In drought-stricken areas, such as California and other states across the West, consumers are used to frequent warnings about the need to save water. Dry public fountains, limits on lawn watering and official requests for shorter showers have all been aimed at reducing water use at a time when reservoirs are shrinking and streams are running dry.

But it turns out that the public reduced water use by only about 5 percent from 2005 to 2010, the most recent period measured by the USGS.

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