

Water conservation hard with snow in Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

It's hard to want to conserve water when it keeps raining and snowing.

That was part of the message delivered to the South Tahoe Public Utility District board last week by Donielle Morse. She is the district's water conservation specialist.

"The sense of urgency is no longer there," Morse told the board.

Participation in the turf buyback program dropped significantly last year and water conservation dropped dramatically from 2015.

2013 was the benchmark year the state of California used for basing water conservation numbers. This is how South Tahoe PUD stacked up against the base year in terms of reducing water use:

	June	July	August	September	October
2015	24.5%	27.4%	20.2%	15.7%	7.3%
2016	12.8%	7.3%	5.8%	7.9%	14.0%

Source: STPUD

Complaints about water abusers dropped from 158 residences in 2015 to 41 in 2016.

"My goal is not to fine customers. It is to work with them and educate them," Morse said.

Fines are reserved for those who defiantly refuse to comply. Two residential customers were fined last years. Ten commercial properties were talked to.

The state is still claiming there is an emergency. Reps from STPUD were in Sacramento this month advocating the state rescind that declaration.

“There are so many agencies stressing to them that they not call it an emergency when it’s not,” Morse said.

The state water board will meet Feb. 2 at which time a decision on the emergency status is expected. While this area of the state is no longer in a drought, parts of Southern California still are. It is up to the governor to declare when the state is and is not officially in a drought. Gov. Jerry Brown has yet to declare the multi-year drought is over.

Despite STPUD customers returning to wanting green lawns and long showers, the district is continuing to remind people water is not an unlimited resource even if it seems like it, especially this winter.

The district has embraced the state’s campaign from 2016 touting efficiency and reducing waste.

Instead of focusing on getting people to remove their grass, for the upcoming season there will be a “suite of options” wrapped into a landscape water efficiency program. The district will work with residential and commercial properties on using less water and perhaps doing less dramatic changes than eliminating all turf.

The district continues to offer rebates for people getting rid of old washers and toilets as ways to incentivize less water use.