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H₂O

As our hot, dry summer comes to a close, I know that water supply is on all our members' minds. The extreme temperatures and the lack of precipitation have me contemplating all the improvements I need to make in my water supply systems. I'm strategizing as to how I can conserve and use water more efficiently.

The problem is that when the rains start again, water concerns seem to fade into the distant recesses of my head. They are forgotten until the problem of insufficient water resurfaces.

At this writing, Gov. Kate Brown has issued drought declarations for 23 of the 36 counties in Oregon. According to the federal government, all 36 are in drought status.

Oregon nurseries lead the way in water conservation and water recycling, but these practices alone cannot solve our water issue. We need to increase our water supply while continuing to implement best practices for water use.

Water storage infrastructure needs to be part of the discussion, both on private lands for our own operations and in the public domain for all users. I operate in the Willamette Basin, which can store 1.6 million acre-feet of water for summer use.

The last reservoir was constructed in 1969, when the population in Oregon was 2 million. The population has increased to an estimated 3.9 million in 2015. That is nearly twice the number of water users, yet the storage — at least in the Willamette Basin — has not expanded in 46 years.

The OAN led the fight in the Oregon Legislature to secure funding for water storage projects. House bills 5005 and 5030 passed during the last legislative session and will provide \$50 million for water storage development projects. These storage projects will benefit not only agricultural users, but also municipal, industrial and recreational users. They also will help supplement river

flows for aquatic species.

On our own nurseries, we can help with water supply in cooperation with the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD). New wells can be developed. Surface storage can be improved and expanded to increase the amount of water available for plant production.

With aquifer storage and recovery, excess water in the high flow months can be stored underground until needed later on. These processes are restricted to areas where the geology is conducive, but the idea is worth exploring further.

The nursery industry provides immense benefits to Oregon and

Oregonians, in terms of both economic output and employment, but we need sufficient water for those benefits to continue. The OWRD has been our partner in this area, and we need to continue to work together to address our water needs.

The OAN offers its members, in cooperation with Jordan Ramis PC, 30 minutes of legal consulta-

tion per month. Attorney Steve Shropshire, counsel for the OAN, is one of the foremost water experts in Oregon and can help members navigate the complex legal issues involving water and its use.

This summer has been a wakeup call for Oregon water users. The last drought of comparable significance happened in 1992. That was 23 years ago. Some agricultural users have had to deal with being cut off from water sources before their crops were harvested, resulting in significant financial hardship.

We all can't wait for the rain to return. It will, but let's not let it wash away our level of concern over future water supplies. That issue isn't going away. The current drought has made it abundantly clear. ☺



By Mike Coleman
OAN PRESIDENT