

COVER
STORY



Dry Times

2003

A TRICKLE Lake Powell is a huge reservoir that is part of the Colorado River. Its water levels have been dropping since 1998.

Parts of the U.S. are struggling with serious water issues

For residents of many parts of the southern United States, rain would be a welcome sight. Parts of the Southwest and the Southeast are very thirsty for water.

Officials in the Southeast recently put emergency water-saving rules in place. In Siler City, North Carolina, residents were ordered to reduce water use by 50 percent. Georgia's Governor Sonny Perdue declared October "Take A Shorter Shower Month." Residents of Atlanta, Georgia's capital, aren't allowed to water their lawns.

These areas are experiencing a serious **drought**. Population growth is making the drought worse. This growth puts a burden on freshwater supplies.

Experts are working on long-term solutions to these water woes. In the meantime, Americans everywhere are thinking about how to conserve one of

the most precious natural resources—fresh water.

Booming Areas

Large numbers of people are moving to, and raising families in, the Southeast and Southwest. Georgia's population increased by 26 percent between 1990 and 2000. The number of people in the Southwest is growing even faster. Nevada's population grew by 66 percent between 1990 and 2000.

Eric Kuhn of the Colorado River Water Conservation District says this growth poses a serious problem. "The demand for water exceeds the supply available during dry periods," he says.

Why So Dry?

Droughts are natural disasters. No one can tell for sure when droughts will begin or end. The

lack of rainfall in the Southeast this year was a surprise. The Southwest has had below average rainfall for several years.

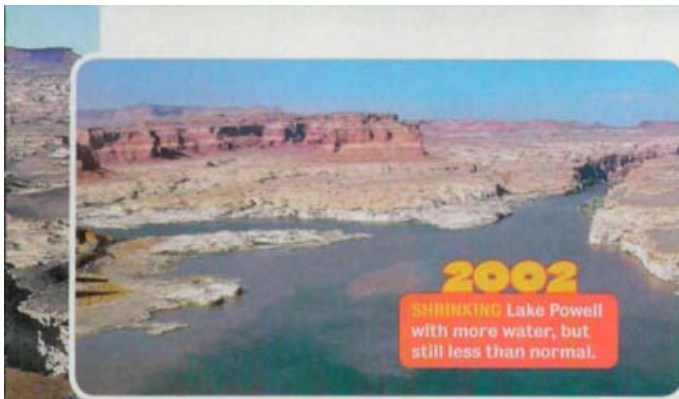
But rain alone won't help refill the Southwest's rivers, lakes, and reservoirs. Scientists think this region is also drier due to global warming.

The Colorado River is the main source of water for seven Western states. Experts have estimated that by 2050, the Colorado River's flow will have been reduced by 18 percent, due to global warming. Melting snow from the Rocky Mountains feeds the river. Scientist say that warmer air is causing some of this snow to evaporate before it melts.



What's that word?

drought: (drou't) *noun*. An extended period of much less rainfall or snowfall than expected.



2002
SHRINKING Lake Powell
with more water, but
still less than normal.

Solving the Problem

Solving the water crisis will require both conservation and long-term planning. In the Southeast, officials from Florida, Alabama, and Georgia are discussing how to divide their limited supply of water fairly and use it wisely.

In the Southwest, scientists are working on more effective ways to water crops. Farmers there need lots of water for their thirsty plants. One idea is to deliver water straight to plants' roots. That requires less water than typical **irrigation** methods. Some officials are also working on solutions that involve turning Pacific Ocean water into fresh water.



DRY DOCKED Before its water level dropped, Lake Lanier in Georgia used to keep this boat afloat.

What's that word?

irrigation: (ir-uh-gay-shuhn) *noun*. The supply of water to crops by artificial means, such as channels or pipes.

Kids Can Help

Even if you don't live in a drought-stricken area, wasting water isn't wise. Many areas are naturally dry. People need to conserve water to make sure there's enough for everyone.

Just ask the fourth-grade class at S.Y. Jackson Elementary in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Last month, the class attended a children's water festival. There, students learned where the region's water comes from and why they need to conserve it. "Water is very valuable in New Mexico," says Michelle Nguyen, 10. "This is very dry land, so we have to conserve water."

Classmate Lindsey Shepherd's family has been quick to put water-saving measures into practice. "We used to take 15-minute showers. Now we take five-minute [showers], and we don't keep the water running when we brush our teeth," says Lindsey, 10 (see *Water Wisdom*).

The students say knowledge about the issue has made their families more wise about water use. "Some people just don't know to care," says Jacob Hyde, 9.

—Elizabeth Carney

Water WISDOM



ALL ABOUT WATER These fourth-grade students from Vista Grande Elementary in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, recently attended a water festival.

Fresh water isn't only used for drinking. In fact, in a typical U.S. household, water is used mostly for bathing and showering. Other water-using activities are cooking, drinking, cleaning, and flushing the toilet. You and your family can conserve water with these easy tips:

- **Limit showers** to no more than five minutes.
- **Turn off the tap** when you wash dishes or brush your teeth.
- **Search your sinks, toilet, and shower** for leaks, and ask an adult to repair any that you find.
- **Only run** dishwashers and washing machines when they're full.

BACK TO YOU

- **What other ways can you think of to help protect the environment?** Plot on a graph the number of hours that you use electricity during each day of the week.