

Dallas Adding Mandatory Rate Hikes to Its Drought-Response Arsenal

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Councilman Philip Kingston's lonely quest to kill off the Lawn Whisperer appears like it's doomed to fail. Mr. Whisperer, a character in advertisements, features prominently in the city's long-term water-conservation plan, which was briefed to the City Council's Quality of Life Committee this morning. But it looks like Dallas Water Utilities has taken Kingston's other water-related directive to heart: "You conserve water by paying a higher price."

As part of its new, state-mandated drought-contingency plan, the city plans to start charging more for water when things get particularly dry.

See also: Dallas Councilman Philip Kingston Wants to Kill Off "Wrongheaded" Lawn Whisperer Campaign

The rate-hike won't apply until the area's reservoirs hit 50-percent capacity (they're currently at 71 percent), and it won't apply to all water users. When the water does drop low enough, however, homes that use 15,000 gallons or more per month and commercial customers who use more than 10,000 gallons per month will pay 25 percent more. When lake levels drop to 45 percent, that jumps to a 50 percent increase.

As DWU director Jody Puckett explained, such an increase serves two functions. For one, higher prices will encourage conservation. Also, "when you have a drought and you're not selling any water, you need higher" prices to offset the department's costs.

For the moment at least, most Dallas residents will be spared the extra costs, but rate hikes have become increasingly common as Texas cities have struggled to cope with drought, as the Texas Tribune reported this morning.