
University shuts off fountains to preserve water

City enacts restrictions for conservation plan after 23-month drought

By Thu Pham

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Visitors to the 40 Acres for Saturday's football game who wanted photos in front of Littlefield Fountain might have noticed that it was not running, like several other landmark fountains on campus.

Beginning Aug. 24, the University turned off all fountains and started a water conservation plan in support of the city's efforts to save water during an extended drought. The drought is entering its 23rd month, said Kevin Buchman, spokesman for the city of Austin Water Utility.

The University has 11 fountains, five of which are out of service, while the remaining six will only operate briefly at night once a week for maintenance purposes. The turtle pond, although considered a fountain, will maintain its water level because of its aquatic life.



Raine Munkens/The Daily Texan

A bird drinks at the East Mall fountain on a Friday afternoon while students finish up for the week. Campus fountains were temporarily turned off due to a city water shortage after a 23-month drought. The University shut off the fountains the same day the city went into Stage 2 watering restrictions, limiting residents outdoor water use.

The University enacted the new policy the same day the city implemented its Stage 2 watering restrictions. The plan limits residences to outdoor watering once a week on designated days and details other procedures that help conserve treated drinking water and preserve the water supply in the Highland Lakes.

“It is temporary, and we’re going to try to keep the water savings plan going through the duration of the city’s Stage 2 drought plan. When they lift the plan, we’ll revisit with them and hope to get the fountains going again,” said Laurie Lentz, spokeswoman for UT Facilities Services.

Aside from the fountains, Facilities Services has made other drastic adjustments to its watering schedule in recognition of the severity of the drought. Campus grounds, lawns and athletic fields are watered two evenings a week instead of six. But the South Mall area receives an extra evening of watering because frequent usage wears the grass down. The athletic fields are watered when the temperature is above 105 for the safety of student athletes.

The University has taken many steps in the past years to conserve water. Last year, the turf in the Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium was replaced with artificial turf, which reduced water usage by 80 percent compared to the previous year, Lentz said.

The new installation of updated plumbing fixtures in many buildings in 2008 will help UT save around 60 million gallons of water annually.

The Division of Housing and Food Services recently installed new showerheads and sink faucets with low water use aerators, toilets that require 50 percent less water and upgraded Energy Star laundry machines in all residence halls.

One of DHFS’s biggest contributions to water conservation is its newly implemented trayless dining, which frees the division from washing 5,000 trays a day.

The University managed to reduce annual water use by 47 percent per square foot, even though the campus has grown by five million square feet in the last three decades.

“We already had put significant savings processes in place, and we do have measurable results,” she said. “We are now being extra mindful to support the city in what it’s trying to do.”



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