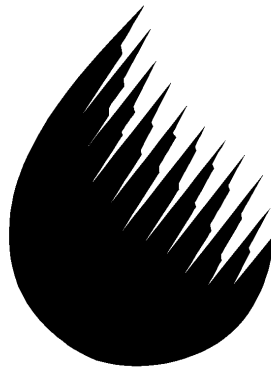


**REPORT FROM THE**  
**SOUTHERN NEVADA WATER AUTHORITY**  
**YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
**TO THE**  
**SOUTHERN NEVADA WATER AUTHORITY**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**February 2003**



**SOUTHERN NEVADA**  
**WATER AUTHORITY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **About the SNWA Youth Advisory Council**

The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) has a strong history of commitment to public participation through citizen advisory committees and other venues. Because the youth of Southern Nevada represent the future, the SNWA Board of Directors felt it was essential that they be included in making decisions that will affect them in years to come. The inaugural SNWA Youth Advisory Council was formed in January 1999 at the request of the Board. The initial group of students reported to the Board in January 2000. Now in its fourth year, the Youth Advisory Council is one component of H<sub>2</sub>O University, the SNWA's youth education program.

The goal of the Youth Advisory Council is to provide a forum in which the SNWA could receive structured and unstructured input from the youth of Clark County on issues of importance to the SNWA, and on water issues that the youth see as pertinent to this community. The objectives are to: expand the SNWA stakeholder base to include Southern Nevada youth; gather ideas from a youthful perspective; receive input on current SNWA programs; strengthen the SNWA's relationship with the Clark County School District; and offer learning activities and leadership experience for Southern Nevada youth. The Youth Advisory Council is slated to report and bring recommendations to the SNWA Board of Directors annually.

To this end, the principals of every public and private high school in Southern Nevada are asked to appoint a representative to sit on the Youth Advisory Council for one year. Twenty-six schools participated in the fourth year. The list of 2002-2003 Youth Advisory Council members and their high schools follows. These students represent some of the best and brightest youth in Southern Nevada. They were selected by their school principals, based on involvement and leadership qualities, as well as an interest in water or environmental issues. As in past years, SNWA Public Information Coordinator Hilarie Hicks Robison coordinated the council and Lewis Michaelson of Katz & Associates served as the neutral facilitator.

While the primary purpose in forming the Youth Advisory Council is to receive input from local youth, there is also a desire and need to provide background information and education about water issues to ensure youth input is of the highest possible quality. Therefore, the students begin their tenure on the Youth Advisory Council with a 20-hour educational course on local water issues. Through this process, students learn about water conservation, resources, quality, the history of water in Southern Nevada, and the Las Vegas Wash. They also tour applicable sites, including the Gardens at the Las Vegas Springs Preserve, Alfred Merritt Smith Water Treatment Facility, and Las Vegas Wash.

After successfully "graduating" from their water courses, the students are equipped with knowledge about our local water situation and the challenges that our arid desert community faces in providing high-quality water for its ever-expanding

population. Following this experience, the students are ready to think about the issues and challenges associated with water and determine how to address them from their unique perspective.

This year's group was concerned about water conservation, particularly because the Southern Nevada community has failed to make progress toward the goal of 25 percent water conservation by 2010 (using 1990 as the base year). Through 1998, Southern Nevada was able to consistently meet ever-higher conservation goals each year. However, the last few years have been disheartening. Instead of making progress, the community actually fell backward in terms of conservation. In 1999, we achieved 16.8 percent conservation, narrowly missing the goal of 17 percent. In 2000, the goal was 18 percent and the community reached 16.5 percent. By 2001, the drop was alarming: though the goal was 19.3 percent, we achieved only 13.5 percent. The students learned from the SNWA Conservation Division that the key to achieving conservation goals is reducing outdoor water use. Because 60-90 percent of residential water is used outdoors, and much of that is wasted, the students wanted to work toward reducing outdoor water consumption. But they wanted to do more than make recommendations or develop ideas to address conservation. They decided to actually take a part in interacting with and educating the public about our precious water supplies and the importance of conserving them. Senior conservation programs coordinator Carrie Lee assisted the students throughout the process.

From April to December 2002, the students kept an intense meeting schedule (for a time, meeting as often as every week) to accomplish their goals. The meeting summaries are attached as Appendix 1. They planned and participated in two community events to educate residents and help them reduce their outdoor water usage. From the beginning, the students were a very hands-on group, creating materials to support their activities. They developed many of their displays and collateral pieces with little or no help from staff. This group understood their role and took ownership of their decisions and activities. Additionally, they effectively used teamwork and division of labor strategies to accomplish a multitude of tasks. The report of their activities, and the lessons they learned, follows. The 2002-2003 SNWA Youth Advisory Council hopes their experiences will help the SNWA achieve its water conservation goal and provide some additional tools or information that may be beneficial for future public education efforts.

**2002-2003 SNWA Youth Advisory Council Member List**

<i>NAME</i>	<i>HIGH SCHOOL</i>
Joseph Fabbi	Advanced Technologies Academy
Jamil Dyer	Basic
Elsa Gendall	Bonanza
Jackie Puche	Centennial
Mandy Anderson	Cheyenne
Kellon Smith	Cimarron-Memorial
Sheila Ildefonso	Clark
Stefanie Ramirez	Community College High School- East
Blair Hogan	Community College High School- South
Sara Neilson	Community College High School-West
Johnny Smyth	Coronado
Lurana Teshima	Durango
Carrie Ostler	Eldorado
Joe Walker	Foothill
Ali Hamrick	Bishop Gorman
Lori Hawkins	Green Valley
Krystal Walford	Las Vegas
Sarah Buchanan	Meadows
Rachel Delacruz	Mojave
Courtney Intiso	Palo Verde
Reuben D'Silva	Rancho
Dallin Henrie	Sierra Vista
Ashley Chiralde	Silverado
Sunshine Mejia	Valley
Leticia "Iris" Acosta	Southern Nevada Vocational Technical Center
Michael Bunn	Western

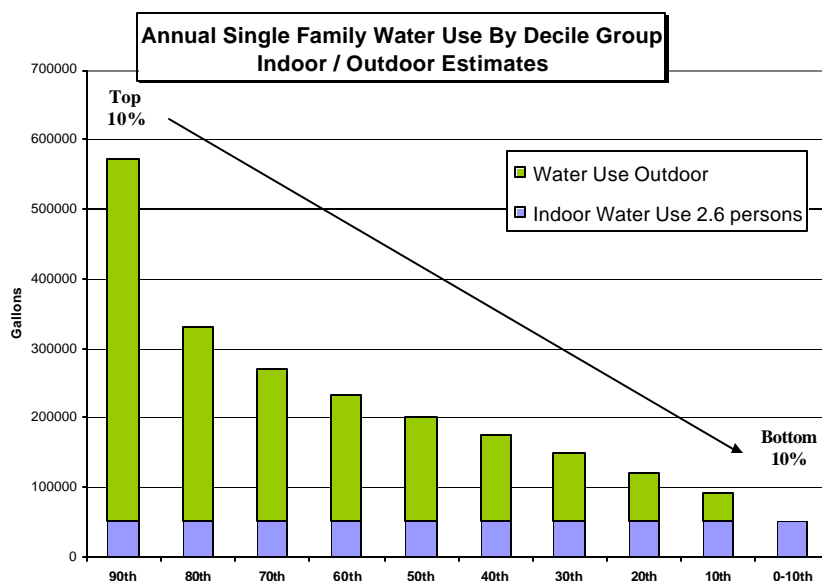
## YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORT

### Problem Statement and Background

The students learned about all facets of conservation but focused on outdoor use, since a reduction in outdoor watering is critical to achieving the 25 percent overall conservation goal by 2010. But the Youth Advisory Council chose to raise the bar even higher by challenging the community to reduce *outdoor* water consumption alone by 30 percent. So their problem statement became:

### **How can we achieve a 30 percent reduction in outdoor water use by 2010?**

The students learned from SNWA Conservation staff that residential water users can be divided into ten groups based on the amount of water they use. Each group of ten percent is called a decile, so there are ten deciles. The two highest deciles, or the top 20 percent of single family resident users, account for more than 40 percent of single family



water usage. Water usage for each of the ten deciles is illustrated in the chart above. It is important to note that indoor water use remains nearly constant across all the deciles; it is outdoor use that increases tremendously at the upper deciles. For a point of comparison, a resident in the top decile uses approximately 575,000 gallons of water each year, while a resident in the bottom decile uses only 50,000 gallons (in contrast with the top decile, the lowest decile usage is virtually all indoors). The second decile uses significantly less water than the highest group: about 325,000 gallons per year compared to 575,000 gallons.

With this knowledge, the students felt it would be most beneficial to focus their efforts on the highest residential water users in the valley. They brainstormed how to best reach this target audience and decided to host an “invitation only” educational event.

The event would provide motivation, education, information, and services to help this special group reduce their outdoor water use. As plans came together, it was decided this special event would be called “Breakfast in the Gardens with the Youth Advisory Council,” as it was to be a morning event held at the Gardens at the Las Vegas Springs Preserve.

In addition to the breakfast, which would be their signature event, the students decided to augment their educational efforts by participating in SNWA’s annual Day with the Experts. At that event, they provided a booth and gave a presentation.

### **Day with the Experts**

Although Day with the Experts was a secondary focus for the students, it came first chronologically. The entire event, which takes place every October, was organized by a team of staff from SNWA’s Public Information, Conservation, and the Gardens at the Las Vegas Springs Preserve. The Youth Advisory Council’s participation included giving a presentation and providing an information booth. The students also developed and administered a survey at the event. Approximately 6,500 people attended Day with the Experts throughout the day on October 19, 2002.

The students created a booth display to educate the public about the Youth Advisory Council. It consisted of pictures, posters, and scrapbooks from all of the youth advisory council years, as well as copies of each year’s report to the SNWA Board. A picture of the booth is below. Hundreds of people stopped by the booth and chatted with the students throughout the day. They learned about the Youth Advisory Council and that young people are involved in helping to manage our precious water resources. Many visitors complimented the youth and expressed their delight that the next generation is already involved in this important issue.



The Youth Advisory Council was assigned a 30-minute time slot to give a presentation in the Gardens' amphitheater. The students worked together to write their presentation, prepare props, and perform. A full text of their presentation is attached as Appendix 2. The presentation focused on the students' problem statement and worked to dispel common myths about water use in the valley. It included an overview of the various water use segments of the population (residential, commercial, hotels, government and schools, parks and golf courses, and industrial). The presentation was interactive in nature, utilizing a matching game where a member of the audience was asked to guess the percentages of water used by each of the water use segments of the population. The correct answers were revealed later in the presentation, when the students shared information about how much water each group uses and what they use it for. The students also presented ways that residents can reduce their outdoor water use, thereby lowering their water bill and contributing to the community's conservation goal. Included as part of the presentation was a "Convert Today" skit featuring a fictional couple, "Tom and Marge," typical Las Vegas homeowners. The purpose of the skit was to vocalize some of the concerns or misunderstandings people have about xeriscape or desert landscaping, then to respond to those misunderstandings. The point of the overall presentation was to encourage residents and homeowners to reduce their outdoor water use, either by more efficient watering practices with current landscapes, or by converting grass to a water smart landscape.

The students prepared a sheet of "Water Saving Tips and Resources from the Youth Advisory Council." The tip sheet was distributed at the end of the presentation and at the students' booth. It is attached as Appendix 3.

The Youth Advisory Council was interested in finding out about the public's knowledge and attitudes related to water use and conservation, especially their understanding of indoor water use versus outdoor use. They believed most people do not understand that the majority of their water is used outside. So the students developed a short survey focused on this topic. The survey consisted of five questions to assess people's attitudes and knowledge about water conservation, including their understanding of the volume of outdoor use compared to indoor use. The survey instrument is attached as Appendix 4.

The students randomly approached attendees at Day with the Experts to ask for their participation, and 179 of them answered the survey questions. The results of the combined responses indicate that people who attend the Day with the Experts event are probably better informed about water conservation than the general public. Generally, their responses indicated they knew the "right answers," both in terms of attitude and behavior, which was somewhat surprising to the Youth Advisory Council. It seems to indicate that the Day with the Experts event is reaching a significant number of people who are already more receptive and knowledgeable in terms of conservation, even before they participate in the educational event.

The students would like to highlight one interesting result of the survey. In response to an open-ended question about what would motivate "you" to conserve more water, twice as many people listed higher water rates or bills, compared with rebate or

incentive programs. The people that suggested higher water rates were also twice as numerous as those who listed education or rules/laws. While the survey admittedly reached a limited audience, this information indicates that higher rates for water may be the most effective way to promote conservation. A complete report of the survey data is attached as Appendix 5.

### **Breakfast in the Gardens with the Youth Advisory Council**

“Breakfast in the Gardens with the Youth Advisory Council” was the signature event for the 2002-2003 Youth Advisory Council. As discussed above, the target audience for this event was the top decile of residential water users. The event was held on Saturday, November 9, 2002. The students worked very hard to prepare a variety of incentives, activities and learning experiences for the event.

First, students drafted an invitation for the event. They prepared the text and information, in addition to suggesting graphics. The invitation was then designed and produced by SNWA’s Public Information Division. The invitation included the following information:

- ❖ Invitation to join the Youth Advisory Council for a complimentary breakfast in the gardens
- ❖ Invitation to receive water-saving advice and learn how to protect yourself from drought
- ❖ Listing of raffle prizes
- ❖ Schedule of activities (breakfast, booths, garden tours, and presentations)
- ❖ Map to event location
- ❖ Request for RSVP

A copy of the invitation is attached as Appendix 6.

The invitation was mailed to 3,000 of the highest residential water users in the valley, as identified by SNWA Conservation and Information Systems staff. The students understood that this is a challenging audience, so they decided to provide some incentives for attendance, in addition to breakfast at the event. Youth Advisory Council members contacted local restaurants and businesses to request donations for raffle prizes. They worked to secure high-end items (like gourmet dinners and rounds of golf) for the raffle to help attract the target audience. Several businesses generously donated gift certificates and other items to be raffled off at the breakfast event. The contributors are listed in Appendix 7.

In addition to creating the invitation and coordinating the raffle, the students planned for educational activities to take place at the event. They enlisted staff support to offer garden tours during the event. They decided to repeat the presentation that they gave at Day with the Experts, as it had been well received and seemed to be effective in delivering the desired message. In addition to the presentation, the students wanted to have mini-booths offering various water conservation services and information to help attendees. They decided on six booth topics:

1. Drought, which provided information about the current Colorado River drought and tips for residents to reduce their water use at this critical time.
2. Hands-on meter booth to teach homeowners how to read their water meter.
3. Hands-on irrigation clock booth to teach homeowners how to set their irrigation clock.
4. Conservation, which provided information about SNWA conservation programs, services, and rebates, including the water smart landscaping program.
5. General information about the Youth Advisory Council, just like the booth at Day with the Experts.
6. Dr. Green Thumb's booth, where horticulturist Linn Mills was stationed to answer plant and gardening questions.

For each booth, the students prepared a variety of educational materials and displays, which they used along with appropriate SNWA publications.

The schedule for the "Breakfast in the Gardens with the Youth Advisory Council" event was designed to allow attendees to participate in all of the provided activities in about 60-90 minutes, although it was an open-house format so people could come and go at any time. The students repeated their presentation three times, and the booths were open throughout the entire event, which ran from 8-11 a.m. The schedule was:

Breakfast:	8 a.m.
Presentations:	8:30/9:30/10:30 a.m.
Garden Tours:	9 a.m. and 10 a.m.
Information Booths:	8-11 a.m.

The students were well prepared and excited to reach this target audience of high water users, in order to help the community achieve conservation goals and the residents to reduce their water bills. They invited 3,000 households with the anticipation that about 5 percent, or 150 households, would attend. Yet their hopes for reaching this group were not realized. About one dozen people attended, a level so low that it almost defies probability. The students had hoped to administer the same survey they conducted at Day with the Experts at this event, so they would have a statistical basis of comparison among the two groups. The low attendance at the breakfast event made this infeasible.

A number of factors may have contributed to the low attendance at the breakfast event, including cold and windy weather, and the fact that it was a holiday weekend (Veterans Day). Also, this event took place before the development and presentation of the SNWA drought plan, so there was not yet a great deal of synergy around the subject. Additionally, the students felt the size and shape (postcard style) of the invitation may have led some invitees to mistake it for an advertisement. But the single greatest obstacle was probably the audience itself. The Youth Advisory Council concluded that the higher water use residents are not motivated by traditional conservation or incentive-based messages.

Although the students had envisioned their participation in Day with the Experts as secondary to their signature breakfast event, the former turned out to be the most impactful. In contrast with the breakfast event, people at Day with the Experts were

highly interested and eager to learn. This audience seemed to care about both youth and water issues; several visitors said they were proud of the young people taking action on water concerns. The attendance of 6,500 indicates that people who are interested will come to an educational event.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, attendance at the breakfast event seems to indicate that no amount or type of incentive is adequate for people who simply are not interested in or concerned about their water usage.

## **Recommendations**

Through their planning and implementation activities, the 2002-2003 Youth Advisory Council learned valuable lessons. The knowledge they gained and tools they developed may be useful to the Southern Nevada Water Authority in the future.

First, the students learned more through the lack of attendance at their breakfast event than they would have with a larger attendance. They anticipated that high-water-use residents would be a difficult audience to reach, which is why they secured significant raffle prizes and advertised them in the invitation. Apparently, these material incentives did not work for this target audience. Neither did more civic or emotional incentives, such as the idea of breakfast in the gardens with young people to learn about drought, water issues and how to reduce water use. In the students' analysis, high-water-use residents have unique characteristics and seem disengaged when it comes to water issues. Nevertheless, it is crucial to reach this audience and help them change their water use to achieve the community's conservation goals. So, the Youth Advisory Council recommends that in the future, SNWA make efforts to go into the communities and neighborhoods with concentrations of high water users instead of trying to get the residents to come to an event. Perhaps if SNWA goes to them, instead of asking them to come to SNWA, staff will achieve success in educating these important water users.

Second, the students received very positive feedback about their presentation, especially the "Convert Today" skit featuring "Tom and Marge," fictional homeowners that have typical misconceptions about xeriscape. Once the characters understand what xeriscape really is, they convert their landscape and realize both anticipated and unanticipated benefits. The skit seems to "hit home" with a lot of people. SNWA may find this humorous skit valuable for use in other venues, be it community events, television or radio commercials, or other outreach materials. The Youth Advisory Council recommends that SNWA use this "Convert Today" script (attached in Appendix 8) to help educate all local homeowners about the true beauty and benefits of desert landscape.

Third, the Youth Advisory Council developed a "Water-Saving Tips and Resources" handout for use at their events. The handout, attached as Appendix 3, provides a list of ways that residents can easily reduce their outdoor water use to minimize effects of the drought. It also provides a list of information resources, including phone numbers and web sites, to assist residents in their water-saving efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Certainly other factors contributed to the attendance of 6,500 people: most significantly, Day with the Experts was mass advertised to the entire community, while the breakfast event was targeted to a specific audience of 3,000.

There may be future uses for this handout, perhaps for events, mailings, or other information distribution venues. The Youth Advisory Council recommends that SNWA utilize this educational tool developed by young people for the public.

In closing, although the students were not able to reach a large number of their target audience, they were certainly successful in educating other members of the public. Day with the Experts visitors who came to the Youth Advisory Council booth and presentation are one example. Beyond that, the students have reached a number of people through informal interactions. They proudly shared their knowledge of and enthusiasm for water conservation with their families, friends, teachers, and neighbors. The 2002-2003 Youth Advisory Council members have become ambassadors for water. The impact of this knowledge and experience will be far-reaching in their lives, as well as impacting those with whom they interact. Herein lies a powerful benefit of the Youth Advisory Council program.

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: 2002-2003 Youth Advisory Council meeting summaries
- Appendix 2: Presentation script (entire)
- Appendix 3: “Water-Saving Tips and Resources from the Youth Advisory Council” handout
- Appendix 4: Survey developed and administered by the Youth Advisory Council at Day with the Experts
- Appendix 5: Report of survey response data
- Appendix 6: Invitation to Breakfast in the Gardens with the Youth Advisory Council
- Appendix 7: Businesses/individuals that donated raffle items
- Appendix 8: “Convert Today” skit portion (only) of presentation script