

## Can We Really Live Using Less Natural Resources? Actually, We Already Are

I have written before in these columns that in the future we will have to learn to consume less and conserve more. And this statement is just based on the facts that the amounts of some natural resources are fixed, like water and fossil fuels, or are becoming more difficult or costly to obtain, and the increasing population, and thus the increasing demand for natural resources.

I know some people hold out hope that new technology will solve some of these problems, and that may indeed be the case. But, for instance, the only way to actually make more fresh water is to remove the salt from seawater or brines, and that involves a lot of additional energy—thus helping to alleviate a water shortage but by using more of another precious resource.

The cheapest water and the cheapest energy is that which is not used, so conservation should certainly be an important component of our future. Another way to look at it is that the less we use of something in limited supply, the longer it will last.

I have heard people talking about this problem express a certain skepticism that we will ever be able to change our habits in terms of use of natural resources or that things like renewable energy will ever be a viable alternative. But those folks are missing the most important thing about this. We are already changing our habits, using less of some natural resources and using more renewable energy.

In this country, most people already have at least one energy- or water-saving appliance in their homes. The national vehicle fuel efficiency average is the highest it has ever been! Lots of us are driving hybrids and some folks (including some people I know) are using all-electric vehicles. Would you have predicted that 25 years ago? For several years now, our fuel supply has been supplemented by ethanol, considered to be a renewable energy source. (Yes, I know, a case can be made that when viewed in totality, corn ethanol may not save much or any fossil fuel.)

Rainwater harvesting, at least in some parts of the country, including ours, is well established and growing. Many rural folks are doing without a well and living completely on rainwater, and a lot more of us are capturing rainwater for at least a part of our water needs. Many new construction projects including businesses, schools, and some whole subdivisions are capturing rainwater. The bottom line is that every gallon harvested off a roof and used either indoors or in the garden is a gallon not pumped out of an aquifer or pumped out of the river.

And then there is the energy situation. A recent article in the Kerrville Daily Times about the local electric supply company, Kerrville Public Utility Board (KPUB) contained some really surprising (for me anyway) information. It turns out that the original source of the energy KPUB buys and that KPUB customers use is over 30% wind energy! WOW.

Who knew that in oil-rich Texas, we could already be getting that much energy from wind?

The article also contained some statistics from the American Wind Energy Association. Texas has more installed wind energy capacity than any other state, with nearly 12,000 wind turbines. State-wide, Texas gets 12.7 percent of its energy from wind. It could power 5.3 million homes. About 25,000 people work in the wind industry in Texas. In 2015, Texas wind turbines produced more energy than the state's two nuclear power plants. Using wind instead of conventional power plants saves 14.7 billion gallons of water annually and avoids the emission of 28.3 million tons of carbon dioxide. For an industry that hasn't been around that long, I find all that incredible.

And I haven't mentioned solar—collecting sunlight with solar panels that can power a whole house and/or feed energy back to the grid. I just saw such a system on a home this morning, and I know people who are living totally off the grid—getting all their energy from solar. Yes, it is expensive, but getting cheaper.

My point of all of this is just that it is clearly possible to conserve resources by using less and by capturing rainwater, wind and sunlight—because we are already doing it, and it hasn't hurt our lifestyle one bit.

Maybe we are already living in the future.

Until next time...

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