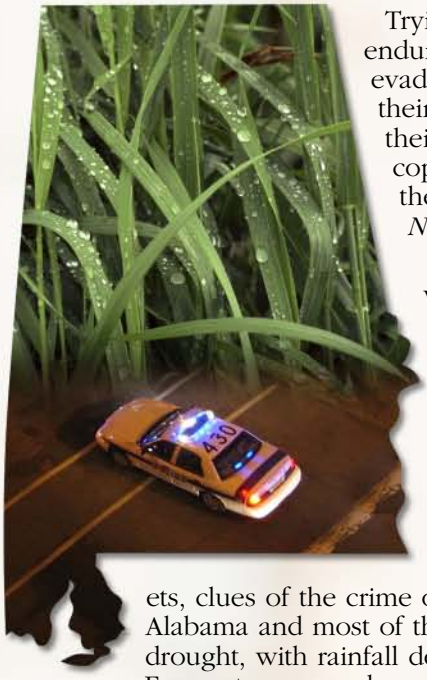
Water Cops in Alabama Seek Midnight Irrigators



Trying to avoid as much as a $400 fine, citizens enduring a severe drought in Calera, Alabama, can't evade the law by sneaking out after dark to water their lawns or to rinse the constant red dust off their vehicles. The local police have become "water cops" and are working day and night to enforce the water use bans, according to a *U.S. Water News* report.

Water use for such frivolous activities as watering flowers may be banned when water supplies fall below critical levels. Dusty cars and crispy lawns are becoming the norm. Calera city officials say although some citizens think it is harsh and seem to be working really hard to get around the restrictions, the ban has helped the city keep water in its storage tanks.

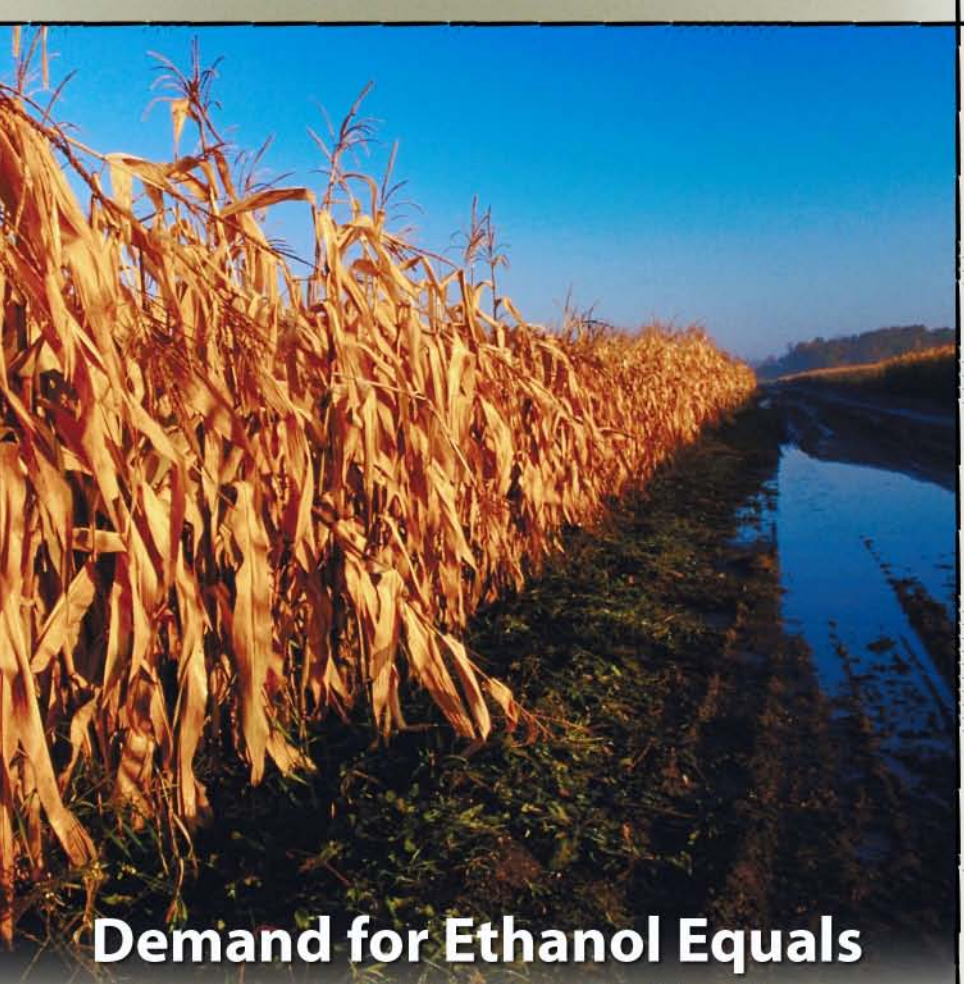
Similar patrols are underway in other drought-stricken places like Atlanta, Florida and Texas—looking for wet grass and wash buckets, clues of the crime of illegal water use. This past summer, all of Alabama and most of the southeastern states experienced a severe drought, with rainfall deficits as much as 20 inches for the year. Forecasters say a drought of such intensity occurs once every 50 to 100 years.

For more information about drought, visit the National Drought Mitigation Center Web site at drought.unl.edu. *You may also write to the center at P.O. Box 830749, Lincoln, NE, 68583-0749 or call (402) 472-6707.*

Whiskey and Water

Drought conditions can be felt across our country and while everyone pities the poor farmer, consider the plight of the poor whiskey distiller.

In the mountains of Lynchburg, Tennessee, the spring from which Jack Daniel's Distillery gets its water is threatened by a recent drought. For more than 140 years, Cave Spring has supplied the special iron-free water that is an essential components of the whiskey's recipe. While the spring hasn't dried up yet, company officials said in a June 2007 MSNBC story that the water is being conserved now to make whiskey and nothing else.



Demand for Ethanol Equals Increased Water Pollution

American farmers are planting more corn this year than they have since the food-shortage years of World War II—an estimated 90.5 million acres, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). And with the demands from the ethanol industry and support from Washington politicians for biofuels, USDA predicts that that amount of acreage in corn will double by 2010.

But this huge demand for corn comes at a cost of more oxygen-stealing chemicals (nitrates and phosphates) running off farms to choke the nation's rivers and lakes with algae, reports the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Corn plants are greedy things, requiring huge inputs of fertilizer in order to maintain their luxuriant growth. And with increased plantings, our already damaged waterways could be additionally harmed.

Fertilizer pollution kills aquatic life by suffocation. With oxygen diminished, the aquatic food chain is upset, fish become scarce, and the algae, which loves the added nitrogen, flourishes. This algae can clog water intake pipes and filters and even promote dangerous bacteria.

To learn more about biofuel production and water pollution, visit the World Resources Institute's Web site at www.wri.org/climate/project_description2.cfm?pid=7.

Saying No to Bottled Water

More and more, U.S. communities are cutting out the water cooler in local government offices and returning to tap water, while saving money in the process.

In San Francisco, California, Mayor Gavin Newsom, has issued an executive order banning city departments from buying bottled water, even for water coolers. The mayor's stated intent was to stem global warming and save the taxpayers money, noting that more than a billion of the empty polycarbonate bottles end up in California's landfills annually.

In Charlottesville, Virginia, Mayor David Brown has made a similar proposal and Chicago officials are considering a 25-cent tax on bottled water. These moves are part of the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement developed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

To learn more about the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, visit the U.S. Conference of Mayors Web site at www.usmayors.org/climateprotection/

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RDUS Loans: Poverty Rate Unchanged; Others Up

Interest rates for Rural Development Utilities Service (RDUS) water and wastewater loans have been announced. The market and intermediate rates are up slightly, while the poverty rate is unchanged.

RDUS interest rates are issued quarterly at three different levels: the poverty line rate, the intermediate rate, and the market rate. The rate applied to a particular project depends on community income and the type of project being funded.

To qualify for the poverty line rate, two criteria must be met. First, the loan must primarily be used for facilities required to meet health and sanitary standards. Second, the median household income of the area being served must be below 80 percent of the state's non-metropolitan median income or fall below the federal poverty level. As of April 1, 2007, the federal poverty level was $20,650 for a family of four.

To qualify for the intermediate rate, the service area's median household income cannot exceed 100 percent of the state's non-metropolitan median income.

The market rate is applied to projects that don't qualify for either the poverty or intermediate rates. The market rate is based on the average of the Bond Buyer index.

The rates, which apply to all loans issued from October 1 through December 31, 2007, are:

- **poverty line: 4.5 percent** (unchanged from the previous quarter);
- **intermediate: 4.5 percent** (up 0.125 from the previous quarter); and
- **market: 4.625 percent** (up 0.375 from the previous quarter).

RDUS loans are administered through state Rural Development offices, which can provide specific information concerning RDUS loan requirements and applications procedures.

For the phone number of your state Rural Development office, contact the National Environmental Services Center at (800) 624-8301 or (304) 293-4191. The list is also available on the Rural Development Web site at www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html.

Could Desalination Aggravate Climate Change?

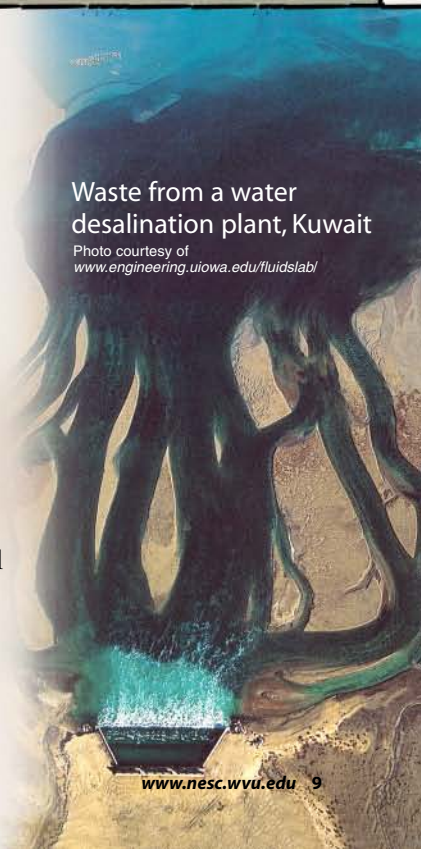
With more than 1,000 desalination plants in operation around the world and becoming a growing trend in drier regions of the world such as the Middle East and Australia, it bears consideration that the highly concentrated saline water that results from the process is sent back to the sea, increasing the salinity of that water and posing a threat to sea life, disrupting neighboring ecosystems.

Some scientists say that extracting salt from water to make it drinkable is the wrong way to handle water shortages around the world and could exacerbate climate change.

In the report *Making Water: Desalination—Option or Distraction for a Thirsty World*, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWFN) recently examined this trend and found that desalination also uses large amounts of energy and emits tremendous amounts of greenhouse gasses. Jamie Pittock, who heads WWFN's freshwater program, states that continued growth of this industry will produce enough greenhouse gas emissions to change the climate dramatically.

Making more drinking water with the help of desalination plants "creates a wasteful attitude to water use," Pittock says, adding that in most cities vast amounts of water are wasted. Instead he would encourage more water-effecient technologies in houses and businesses, reducing leaks and increasing the recycling of wastewater.

Read more about desalination and download the WWFN report at www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/index.cfm?uNewsID=106660



Waste from a water desalination plant, Kuwait

Photo courtesy of *www.engineering.uiowa.edu/fluidslab/*