

It's National Rivers Month

Wherever you live in Illinois, you are surrounded by a seemingly limitless supply of clean drinking water. It's everywhere. People give it away. Walk into any a restaurant, and, without being asked, someone comes along and fills a glass of clean drinking water just for you. It's free. So common is this precious natural resource in Illinois, people everywhere can be seen pouring gallons of perfectly good drinking water on their front lawns all summer. We spray it on our vehicles. We fill pools with thousands of gallons of it, add a few chemicals that make it undrinkable, then dive in. Children on summer break, armed with garden hoses, spend hours blasting torrents of drinking water against rivals armed with squirt guns. A seemingly endless supply of drinking water gushes forth without the slightest parental admonition.

Elsewhere, even as it rains, automated lawn sprinklers pump perfectly good drinking water into the air and, almost immediately, the water vanishes into storm sewers. So goes our perfectly good water. Despite the fact there are now more than 12.8 million people living in Illinois using billions of gallons



of clean water daily, almost none of us think about the limits to our source of clean water.

Yet we really should. When one considers the logistical challenge of obtaining and delivering billions of gallons of fresh, clean water every day to the entire state of Illinois, day after day, from industry to home, a question of future sustainability arises. What will

happen as our population increases? Is the supply of clean water in Illinois truly endless? Is the resource capable of increasing output to accommodate an Illinois future with, say, 13 million people—or 15 million?

Our ability to constantly provide safe drinking water to millions of people in Illinois cannot continue unless we realize water conservation is an inevitable necessity for this truly essential resource. We've all heard the old expression, "You never miss the water until the well runs dry." In some groundwater-dependent communities in Illinois, taps already have run dry in recent years. And while the well hasn't yet run dry for the majority of water users in Illinois, consider this a call to action. It would be a serious, and potentially catastrophic, error for us to ignore the fact clean, fresh water can-

not be extracted from nature in unlimited quantities forever.

Illinois remains a water-rich state. Yet why not begin conserving water today for our thirsty future? June is filled with opportunities to celebrate and enjoy our rich water resources in the Prairie State. June is National Rivers Month, a perfect occasion to get outdoors, visit a state park, hike a shoreline trail, kayak a river, wet a line (June 10-13 are Free Fishing Days in Illinois—see details below), or organize a river or lake cleanup through your local conservation group. You also can take this month of fresh gardens to reflect on your personal water usage while doing landscaping projects around the home.

Do you own rain barrels? Many gardeners report meeting 75-100 percent of their summer watering needs by catching rainwater that would otherwise run out of gutters and into storm sewers. Consider creating a backyard rain garden and mini wetland that can reduce lawn-mowing while improving the quality of water that flows across your property.

Doing your part to conserve and protect our shared resource of fresh water in Illinois might seem like a drop in the bucket today. But millions of people collectively can meet the future demand in Illinois by adopting a wiser use of this precious resource many of us now take for granted. We must all develop sustainable water-use habits before the opportunity dries up.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marc Miller".

Marc Miller, Director

Free Fishing Days are scheduled for June 10-13, 2011 in Illinois. On those dates, a sport fishing license is not required for anglers fishing at bodies of water where a valid Illinois sport fishing license is usually required. Daily creel limits and site-specific regulations still apply.