WaterSense-AWE Webinar Recap

The Search for Water Efficient Turfgrass

TODAY'S SPEAKERS	ORIGINAL DATE: MARCH 2ND, 2022
• **Sarah LaVoy** – Environmental Protection Specialist, EPA WaterSense • **Ron Burke** – CEO and President, Alliance for Water Efficiency • **Kevin Morris** – President, National Turfgrass Federation (NTF) • **Geoffrey Rinehart** – Coordinator of the NTF Grass Roots Initiative, National Turfgrass Federation	WaterSense Webinars Webinar Recording on YouTube

INTRODUCTION: SARAH LAVOY

Ms. LaVoy from the EPA began by introducing the relationship between turfgrass and WaterSense. She pointed out that WaterSense is not anti-turfgrass, but desires an efficient holistic use of turfgrass along with other water-efficient practices in the landscape and irrigation. She encouraged everyone to think critically about their landscape needs, and think about a design that uses turfgrass as throw rug in spaces where it can serve an intendent purpose, rather than wall-to-wall carpeting. Ms. LaVoy continued to speak on the challenges that water utilities face in securing and maintaining water supply during peak irrigation periods in the summer, and how those challenges will be exacerbated with climate change. She reiterated the need to be intentional in designing and maintaining outdoor spaces by putting the right plant in the right place, and providing it with the right amount of water.

> **WaterSense Materials at** https://www.epa.gov/watersense
>
> • The WaterSense Water-Smart Landscapes guide
> • Turfgrass and Water Efficiency
> • Watering Tips

AWE UPDATE: RON BURKE

Following that, Mr. Burke spoke on the results of an evaluation that AWE had carried out on water utility programs and market readiness for landscape transformations. AWE concluded that while many homeowners are disconnected form their outdoor water use, they are, with the proper incentive, willing to invest in water-efficient landscapes. Mr. Burke continued to cover useful resources available to AWE partners including the *Sustainable Landscapes: A Utility Program Guide* and *Learning Landscapes: Outdoor Water Efficiency and Conservation Lessons.*

Find the entire Assessment of Water Utility Programs and Marketing Readiness Evaluation here.

FEATURED SPEAKERS: MR GEOFFREY RINEHART AND KEVIN MORRIS

Mr. Rinehart provided an overview of the benefits of turfgrass, the components affecting quality, and common types of turfgrass by growing zone. He noted that turfgrass can provide several ecosystem services when properly managed in a landscape. It can be an especially useful tool in urban areas to mitigate the heat island effect, as well as create spaces that are culturally important in society. When researching water-efficient turfgrass varieties, it is important to also weigh the performance in recoverability, persistence, drought tolerance, uniformity, and color. All these desired traits and water

requirements of turfgrass are dependent on the climate in which they are planted. Turfgrass varieties are generally divided into three growing zones, cool, transitional, and warm, roughly based on latitudes and climates in the US. Each zone will have different species that meet desired performance standards while also meeting a level of water efficiency. Common cool-season grasses include, tall fescue, fineleaf fescue, Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass. Common warm-season grasses include bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, St. augustinegrass, and centipedegrass. Warm and cool-season grasses often grow successfully in the transition zone but thrive during different seasons. Picking the right variety of turfgrass for your local climate is a crucial part of a water efficient landscape in addition to proper lawn maintenance.

Mr. Morris provided an overview of the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP), which assesses different varieties of turfgrass through an extensive 5 year testing process to evaluate grass performance. NTEP coordinates with a broad array of partners including universities, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and turfgrass breeders. The program is currently testing more than 600 types of grasses from 20 species at testing sites located throughout the U.S. The data collected is used to determine the quality of the grass based on scores given on a scale of 1-9. The characteristics evaluated include descriptive characteristics, response to disease and pests, environmental stressors including cold and drought, and how well the grass holds up under recreational use. This evaluation can help identify durable turfgrass varieties that coupled with good management practices can be a part of a water-efficient landscape. Mr. Morris briefly described efforts in Georgia and Texas to work with water stakeholders to identify types of turfgrass that need less water and are more drought tolerant. He noted that all the reports on NTEP trials are available to the public at ntep.org.

CONCLUSION

There are plenty of challenges facing water supplies in the US. The intentional use of turfgrass in a landscape can still be part of a water-efficient landscape that helps lower peak water demands in the hot summer months. Certain varieties of turfgrass are more suitable for specific climates than others and growers are cultivating types of turfgrass that are more drought tolerant. Selecting the right plant for your needs and local climate can contribute to a functional water-efficient landscape, and with proper management, realize substantial water-savings.