



CONNECTING THE DROPS: LINKING URBAN WATER USE WITH LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS

Water resources – water quality, stream flows, etc. – consistently rank as Americans’ top environmental concern. Yet, at the local level, most people do not know what they can do to improve water resources in their community or region. At the same time, water utilities are ramping up water conservation programs in the face of increasingly scarce water supplies, especially in Western states. Conserve to Enhance (C2E) links these issues for the first time – making a difference in places people care about, while increasing conservation by municipal water users.

A NEW APPROACH

C2E’s innovative approach provides a direct link between voluntary water conservation actions by water users and local environmental projects. Once a C2E program is established, water customers can voluntarily participate and:

1. **Conserve water** at their home or business by changing behaviors and/or installing new water conserving fixtures or appliances.
2. **Track water savings** compared to their past water use through their water bills.
3. **Donate** the money saved on their water bill as a result of water conservation to a C2E fund.
4. Then, the C2E fund provides money for **community-selected environmental enhancement projects**, ranging from securing instream flows to restoring native vegetation to installing new green infrastructure projects.

By providing a mechanism to link water use with donations, C2E provides a new funding stream for environmental projects and a new motivation for water users to conserve. And because C2E-supported projects take place in participants’ own communities, they can easily see their efforts are having a meaningful impact for the environment. A pilot program in Tucson has saved over 500,000 gallons of potable water and generated thousands of dollars in donations for an environmental restoration project in just a few months.

MULTIPLE BENEFITS

What makes Conserve to Enhance unique is its ability to provide multiple benefits and meet a variety of utility and community goals, all through a simple, easy to understand tool. Utilities benefit from increased conservation by consumers, the ability to link C2E to existing conservation programs, and new education and outreach opportunities. The public benefits from environmental enhancement projects in their community or region, the ability to support these projects at no new cost to them, and increased awareness of connections between their behavior and the environment.

INTERESTED IN BRINGING C2E TO YOUR COMMUNITY?

Three essential elements are needed to launch a successful C2E program:

1. **Support from local partners** to help implement the program and deliver on environmental goals
2. **An environmental enhancement project or initiative** that has a water connection, is valued by the community, and is in need of support.
3. **An accounting tool** that tracks participants’ water use, water bills, and C2E donations.

The University of Arizona Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) has experienced staff available to assist with the development of each of these key elements. C2E was originally developed at WRRC. The Center has led the implementation of a C2E program in Tucson, AZ and is working with communities throughout the West to scope C2E pilot programs. Contact us if you are interested in finding out more about implementing C2E in your community:

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<http://www.cals.arizona.edu/azwater/conserve2enhance.html>

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