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It has been a dry year here in south Alabama, but usually we are blessed with an above average annual rainfall, and have plenty of fresh water for both necessities and for recreation. We have more than 75,000 miles of streams, 3.6 million acres of wetlands and 490,000 acres of lakes, ponds and reservoirs. On the other side of the equation, however, development has increased substantially in the last decade, and according to the US Census Bureau (2005) Alabama has a population of over 4.5 million. Mobile County is home to 400,000 people, and Baldwin County 163,000. In addition to those that live here, Alabama had 21.8 million visitors in the year 2005, with a good portion of those visiting the two coastal counties. That adds up to a lot of water consumed by a lot of people. Many realize the importance of keeping the water we have clean, but it's also important to not waste the water that we have and to not to treat it as a never-ending resource.

When I turn on my tap, I take it for granted that clean cold or hot water will come out. There are little things that I can do, and things every household can do to help insure that this will hold true for the next generation. It will also save money, and with gas prices on a steady incline we can all use that. First make sure you don't have any leaks in your plumbing, toilets, or underground piping. A leaky faucet is easy to spot, but other leaks in the system may not be. Mobile Area Water and Sewer has a great guide that identifies how to spot hard-to-find leaks. A small water-saving step that every member of a household can do is to turn off the water while shaving or brushing their teeth. Install low-flow shower heads and low-flush toilets, and run full loads of laundry. Recycle cans, bottles, paper, motor oil, tires, batteries, plastics, etc. Each of these will conserve water indirectly; every ton of paper recycled, for example, saves about 7,000 gallons of water. Don't overwater your landscape, and by

mulching and using native plants you can minimize the amount of watering you need to do to keep plants alive. If you do need to water, water early in the morning to minimize evaporation.

Doing some of these simple steps in your household will not only be helping to conserve our most valuable natural resource, but will also save you money. For those itching to get even more involved in water conservation, join a local water watch group and become a volunteer stream monitor, or join an adopt-a-stream or adopt-a-mile program. Contact Shonda Borden at the Auburn Marine Extension and Research Center at (251) 438-5690, or by email at bordesm@auburn.edu for more information.