For lawn’s sake, seed those clouds: Ralph Shaffer

By Ralph Shaffer

For the fourth time since late April, moisture-laden clouds passed unseeded Tuesday morning over my home in the San Gabriel Valley. The rain that would have given parched lawns and shrubs, as well as worried homeowners, a little relief moved eastward without dropping more than a trace of rain. Gov. Jerry Brown orders a 25 percent cutback in water usage, water districts threaten fines, neighbors are turned into snitches — but the cloud-seeding that could offer temporary relief is never mentioned. Why?

Those who’ve ordered water conservation because of the drought again relied on Mother Nature instead of giving her a hand. Frustrated homeowners cry out for action, but the drones that could release silver iodide in those clouds and give our lawns a sip are on the ground. If ever there was a time for cloud-seeding, this is it.

Everybody talks about the drought but nobody does anything about it. Will local government and the governor dare to act?

If the governor can issue an executive order designed to turn your lawn brown in this crisis, why doesn’t he proclaim one ordering a little cloud-seeding? Instead, he and the Legislature rushed to spend $600 million for flood control but not one cent of it went for an immediate way to produce more rain.

Meteorologists and professional rain makers have been experimenting with cloud-seeding since Hatfield the rainmaker a century ago. Serious efforts at cloud-seeding began in the 1940s. Since then it has been adopted by a variety of agencies, universities and private companies.

New Mexico State University undertook a major cloud seeding project to furnish water to drought-stricken ranchers and farmers in the western part of that state as their aquifer dried up.

Desert Research Institute, a branch of Nevada’s system of higher education, has carried out cloud-seeding in the Tahoe basin for years as a means of increasing the run-off into the western section of that state.

Los Angeles’ Department of Water and Power initiated a program of snow- and rainfall-enhancement through cloud-seeding in the Eastern Sierra.

A drastically falling water table in the San Joaquin Valley, similar to the problem in New Mexico, has left fields fallow, farm workers unemployed and farmers on the verge of bankruptcy. Why doesn’t either the University of California’s agricultural branch at Davis or one of the Cal State universities in the valley undertake an intensive effort to increase rain and snowfall as a means of replenishing aquifers in the San Joaquin?
There are legal complications, but in the face of what our political and economic leaders tell us is a weather disaster, why not run the risk of overstepping a legal boundary, a risk that might not be as great as the timid suggest it is? Courts may be more willing to allow questionable actions in the form of cloud-seeding in the face of a natural disaster. Why can’t Brown declare a weather catastrophe, accompanied by a similar declaration from President Obama?

We don’t have to wait years for dams to be built, desalinization plants to begin operating or construction of an aqueduct from flood-plagued areas east of the Rockies. We can take immediate action, at little expense, the next time a reluctant cloud formation floats overhead. Or we can all have a “Jerry Brown lawn.”