



December 30, 2008

Have our river and drink it, too

Speaking of threats to the Poudre River, did you know the city of Greeley is in the process of constructing the final piece of a 60-inch-diameter - yes, a 5-foot-diameter - pipe to carry its water (that to which it has legal right) from near the mouth of the Poudre Canyon to Greeley?

Is this really a threat or just another little project? Should we be worried?

People sometimes wonder why they should care about things such as global climate change or, more locally, keeping our river alive and healthy. After all, climate and rivers change naturally over geologic time scales, even without our input. As this relates to living things, it has resulted in winners and losers.

While life itself has persisted, countless individual life forms have come and gone - what is our fate and when? Although humans have demonstrated a great capacity for invention and an ability to modify our environment, we seem to lack the vision and common sense to make the best use of it - might this be our Achilles heel?

Remember the frog in the pot of water, heating on the stove - because the frog doesn't notice the gradual heating of the water, it takes no evasive action, and boils to death - within a hop of safety. It's similar to "death by a thousand cuts," but in this case, we will be the victims and we are holding the sword! We are killing our rivers - failing to notice the incremental damage we are causing, until it is too late.

Did you know that within our system of water law that "commodifies" water, our rivers have few if any rights to their own water, not even if their existence depends on it?

Reflecting on her experience in Phoenix, Carol Shinn (Dec. 17, Soapbox) astutely draws our attention to the way in which the Salt River has been dried up by human demand for water. We have heard a lot about the proposed Glade Reservoir and its potential to cause ecologically damaging reductions in spring runoff, as well as contributing to the ultimate dewatering of the Poudre River in the LaPorte/Fort Collins area. The Greeley pipeline is yet another damaging project, another deadly cut.

While flows in the Poudre River continue to drop, Greeley's water will increasingly flow in pipes, parallel to a river dying of thirst. This is insane. The argument is that it would cost Greeley too much to treat the water that arrives naturally at its doorstep because of upstream pollution from agriculture and urban activities.

As a community, we need to "own" this toxic byproduct of our lifestyles and take care of it. Those with water rights should be required to extract and return the water they use, in good condition, as close as possible to where they use it. Keeping the water in the river, while continuing to use some of it, would help the long-term survival of our Poudre River, on which our quality of life depends.
