



May 14, 2008

Keep your eye on the canary

Mandy Kotzman

In days of old, miners took canaries in to the mines with them because they were more sensitive to toxic gases than the miners were. When the canary died, the miners knew it was time to get out, to change what they were doing.

Like all living things, people need water to survive. The more people there are, the more water we use - and we waste it. Like it or not, there are limits to how many people this Earth can support. If we keep doing things the way we are now, sooner or later, we will reach a limit. It's not a question of "if," but rather, "when." But now we can choose.

A recent article in the Coloradoan claimed that the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project (including Glade Reservoir) would provide water to some Northern Colorado residents for 60 years, only 60 years! Then what? Another project, more diversions, another dam, another river, until we run out? A river without water ceases to exist. When rivers die, people die, too. The Poudre River is our canary, challenging us to change our ways. We ignore this warning at our peril.

As a result of historic decisions, Colorado has a system of water rights that distribute water to users on the basis of need and priority of claim. It surprises many people to hear that the river itself has no "right" to its own water. The critters at the base of the aquatic ecosystem, whose survival and reproduction may depend on subtle changes in diurnal or seasonal flows or water temperature are completely at our mercy.

Currently, the river only exists, as a natural-looking irrigation ditch, to service people. Ever noticed the "on again, off again" flows in the Poudre dictated by the demands of human use? Did you know that a portion of the river is already piped past Fort Collins to Greeley? And that they are planning to pipe a lot more this way (because of their "rights"). Did you know that catching the water from your roof (a major drought survival strategy in Australia) is not even legal in Colorado - this water already belongs to someone else!

It's time for change. Constant growth is not sustainable for populations or economies. The benefits are accrued by a few powerful people in the short term, at the expense of the masses and the planet now and, more significantly, in the future. The major costs will be borne by those who have no say in the current debate.

Plan for the long-term. Keep your eye on our canary - the Poudre River. Begin by saying "no" to NISP and requiring Greeley to leave its water "rights" in the river until it reaches Greeley!
