

Windsor NOW!

'Water neutrality' can solve shortages

David Karan, Guest Commentary
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Concern about water supply in the western United States is always in the forefront when anyone discusses growth. Debate rages about the benefits and negative impacts of growth. The argument is inevitably framed as "pro-growthers" vs "no-growthers." This is a false dichotomy. Where are the shades of gray? We can affect the rate of growth. We can reduce the negative impacts. Is it inevitable that we require more water when our population increases?

Let's examine this as-sumption critically. It seems self-evident to many that more residents require ever more water. This assertion is both misleading and erroneous.

First, the amount of incremental water needed to support growth is not a constant. Various communities on the Front Range have quite different per capita consumption.



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Second, when irrigated agricultural land stops growing crops and livestock, and shifts to growing houses, water becomes available. Thus a portion of the increased water needs for this residential development is already offset. Reduction in per capita residential use, reductions in evaporation in storage and transport, and reuse of water through gray water systems can all make up for more of the "needed" water. What really is self-evident is that we will eventually run out of new water if demand continues to increase. Increasing storage and supply just delays the inevitable crisis.

The sustainable solution is reaching "water neutrality" by 2020. "Water neutrality" means that each new residence would be offset by demand management and increased efficiency of our supply system. Just like goals in international treaties to control greenhouse gases focus on achieving "carbon neutrality," the Front Range should set a similar goal for balance between water supply and demand. Even if you doubt the attainability of this goal, we really have no choice but to move in that direction. To repeat the obvious, sooner or later growth will outpace the possible increase in water supply.

How would we meet this goal? The solution starts in each community and each unincorporated portion of all counties. Water utilities would be directed to achieve water neutrality by 2020. Water districts and our so-called water "conservancy" districts also would be governed by this imperative. Negotiating bilateral intergovernmental agreements is a tried-and-true method. We should do more. We need a truly regional solution. Neutrality could be defined on a watershed-by-watershed basis.

However, prevalent inter-basin water transfers undercut this approach. A regional sustainable solution requires two things: one, pooling the water resources available to the Front Range and, two, no additional trans-basin diversions built. We would live with our own finite supply.

In summary, it is indisputable that economic development, population growth and sprawl will continue to eat up our agricultural land and continue to inevitably drain the finite supply if we proceed with business as usual. Let's begin a campaign to approach water neutrality now.

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