

Too soon for Glade's heavy toll

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Many of today's challenges originate with our insatiable desire for more. More farmland for development, more horsepower, more health care, more oil, more lanes and, top of the news, more water.

As I stop-and-go through another Interstate 25 construction zone, ever-present since we arrived here in 1992, the end of road widening is nowhere in sight. Six jammed lanes will make the case for eight, then 10. Driving from Fort Collins to Loveland, the divider of farmland seems to narrow before my eyes. Soon, the cities will merge. When Wellington to Colorado Springs is one continuous sprawl, what will remain of the Northern Colorado we love?

One sweltering summer decades ago, on my grandfather's farm in Kansas, the need for more hung in the air like the heat waves over the arid cropland. The farm hands kept busy sweating over the equipment; field work would have been wasted effort. In one outbuilding, a pipe jutted over the cistern, dribbling well water. We kids doubled up on flushes and shallow baths, and along with the grown-ups, worried when the sky might give us a little more.

Must we face such dire need of more water to justify drastic moves such as the Glade Reservoir project? Here, fresh sod rolls out on relinquished farms from Bellvue to Greeley, office-building fountains burst skyward, sprinklers drench emerald lawns, even in a rainstorm and water remains the least expensive utility for homeowners. No, we don't have to suffer the parched reality of my grandfather's farm to justify the toll of Glade, but we need to have tried harder to make do with less.

Glade proponents argue that with average families using 160,000 gallons annually, coupled with projected population growth, securing a new supply is our only choice. But it's folly to accept such consumption as average.

How might that number change with regionwide xeriscape, low-volume toilets, low-flow showerheads and graywater capture and reuse? One study showed how low-flow spigots alone brings that number down to 130,000 gallons. What about steepening the incline of water rates to provide incentives to conserve? By capturing more money from water wasters we can boost the rebate for efficient appliances above the current \$25 to \$50 and raise enough to fund low-flow spigots for every homeowner. Bold ideas also exist on the commercial side.

As we splash in our oasis, these methods seem severe, but they are less draconian than crippling the Poudre River.

Listen to those who view Glade as a personal threat to an old friend. If the Poudre were a man, he would be facing the amputation of both legs. With each of my two daily crossings of the Poudre, I observe the flow. When the spring and summer waters rush, my heart lifts. Cutting up to 71 percent of that flow will reduce our treasure to a creek. Coming to terms with such a loss might be easier if those screaming "More!" were matched by bold efforts to reduce consumption.

When Don Williams sang, " 'Til the rivers all run dry," his symbol for undying love was as unlikely as the sun falling from the sky. If we cannot learn, through imagination and determination, to consume less, Williams' love song might become tragic irony.

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