

Water forum asks: What's worth fighting for?

BY **BOBBY MAGILL** • BobbyMagill@coloradoan.com • February 4, 2011

In the West, the saying goes, whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting.

In Larimer County, the fighting is usually about the Poudre River's water, which is claimed by many for recreation, agriculture, growing cities and for the sake of the river itself.

More than 300 people turned out Thursday night at the Larimer County office building in Old Town to consider the best ways to keep the various future needs of Poudre River water from being fodder for a fight as part of a UniverCity Connections-sponsored series of public forums called "The Poudre Runs Through It: Northern Colorado's Water Future."

Author Laura Pritchett suggested people find "the radical center," the place where those with sometimes drastically different ideas about the river can meet to civilly discuss their views and find solutions to the region's water needs without fighting.

The radical center, she said, should be that middle ground where people discover there isn't just one solution for the water - either store it in Glade Reservoir or not at all. Those in the radical center, she said, seek to find a "portfolio" of solutions.

"One thing that has not had a seat at the table: Are there ways we can appreciate the river other than as a commodity?" she said. "We all know the river has other values. I simply wonder whether or not we can bring those into discussions (so) that we can achieve the radical center."

The Poudre faces enormous challenges: Northern Colorado is expected to nearly double in population during the next 40 years, with the state's population possibly reaching 10 million, leaving its water supplies short possibly by more than 500,000 acre-feet annually.

The Poudre River, water managers say, is going to be the source of some of that water.

The fundamental threat to the Poudre River is urban growth, said Reagan Waskom, director of the

Colorado Water Institute at Colorado State University.

"Much of the future water demand will be right here in the Front Range corridor," he said. "We haven't as a society decided if we want to control that growth yet."

What, he asked, are Northern Colorado residents willing to give up as water supplies dwindle? Agriculture? Local beer?

"There's simply not enough water in this stream to satisfy all of these desires," he said.

The series of forums is designed to encourage the community to come to some answers about the difficult decisions it'll have to make sooner or later.

That process started Thursday when the forum's organizers turned the microphones over to members of the public.

"When we talk about growth (and biological systems), there is no biological system that says grow or die," said Tim Johnson, who was wearing a "Save the Poudre" sticker.

He said Fort Collins managed to find a way to cope during a past water shortage, and it should do so again.

"My biggest concern is we're ignoring the root cause of the water issue, that is we have exponential population growth in a country and world with limited resources," said Glen Colton of Fort Collins.

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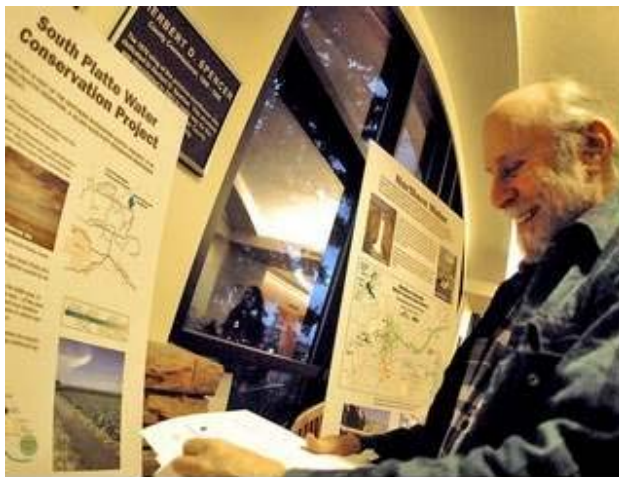
"I want to get back to where we can have a discussion as to how many people we want in our country."

Lynn Hall of Fort Collins said her biggest fear is losing the wildlife habitat along the Poudre River through the city.

"To have a natural river with as much wildlife habitat as it has a few blocks from downtown is really a miracle," she said. "We need to be really clear to figure out how we can make this accessible to humans, but not as an urban construction."

The second part of the series of forums will be three education sessions scheduled for Feb. 24, March 10 and March 24 at the Larimer County office building, 200 W. Oak St.

Those will be followed by two public dialogue sessions on April 11 and 16.



Sandy Lemberg picks up some literature Thursday before 'The Poudre Runs Through It: Northern Colorado's Water Future' forum at the Larimer County Courthouse. The event, sponsored by UniverCity Connections, was the first of a series of public meetings to promote community dialogue about local water issues. (Jeremie Schatz/The Coloradoan)

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