

1500 W. Mountain Ave.
Fort Collins, CO 80521
September 17, 2014

To:

Colorado Legislature / Water Resources Review Committee (WRRRC),
Colorado Water Conservation Board, and Governor Hickenlooper,

As a resident of this state for the majority of my life, and of the North Front Range, I feel a great responsibility when it comes to the wise use of water and the rivers which supply it. So I am compelled to share my thoughts with respect to the State Water Plan that is currently under consideration.

While I appreciate that those who've crafted this plan have spent considerable time on it, it concerns me that there has not been enough representation of the broad public interests particularly with respect to maintenance of adequate river flows.

While it would seem that the need for conservation is acknowledged, too little is being done in this regard and too much emphasis is given to additional water storage. In this regard, the plan seems to be an extension of past, archaic thinking, i.e. that we should simply build more or bigger dams and reservoirs as the (mostly) Front Range population grows; as if the rivers themselves represent some infinite supply.

No one would state the latter point directly, of course. But that seems to be the effective response, whenever we face tough choices related to the adequacy of supply in the face of growth.

I think it is time for our leaders to come to grips with the reality and begin to address the need for healthy rivers even as we consider the needs of a growing population. Such plans would consider the conditions needed to sustain healthy riparian ecosystems, including not only the conditions (like river flows and related water temperatures, etc.) needed for healthy native fish populations, but also for other riparian species and indicators of a healthy ecosystem.

Beyond the importance of rivers' existence to tourism and recreation - two facets of our state's economy and quality of life that are impossible to overstate- our rivers have other intrinsic values that we collectively have not yet begun to appreciate. And our spiritual and religious traditions remind us of the importance of wise stewardship; a charge I do not feel we have yet taken seriously.

So I would like to see much greater emphasis placed on water conservation, and better statewide support for water sharing. I know that years ago I learned of the peculiar "use it or lose it" mandate that derives from western water law. Agricultural users thus had little incentive to implement conservation technologies, and to this day continue to rely on dated,

inefficient technologies simply because there remain disincentives – along with lack of any contrary incentives, for conserving water. This must be rectified.

I also think the State can do much more in terms of enabling water sharing that benefits both urban and rural users. While unfortunately, our treatment of water as a mere commodity has often created a built-in conflict between urban and rural consumers, the state has taken modest steps in the past to try to reduce this, and I think much more can be done.

The State has already taken some modest steps in terms of enabling “reuse” of water; more should be done here, as well.

It’s also quite clear, from the disparity in per-capita consumption between various communities that far more can be done to directly encourage conservation among the urban users. Providers should for example be required to offer tiered water rates that reward those who use water frugally and which dis-incentivize wasteful practices. Annexation and development practices should be updated to reflect the reality of limited supplies – long before we get to the point where such is no longer an option but a limitation imposed by nature itself.

In fact, we should begin an honest dialogue about carrying capacity along the Front Range in the face of a finite resource. It should begin and end with the asking and answering of the first question: what do we mean by healthy rivers? What is required to keep them in a state that at the very least supports the diversity of life that nature has placed therein?

And if we are willing to do our part to maintain healthy rivers, then what does that imply in the way of limitations of our diversions from the rivers? If we can maximize the efficiency of our use of the water they supply, while supplying the legitimate needs of agricultural, industrial and residential consumers, what would be a safely accommodated “build-out” of the Front Range, as well as other areas that have been experiencing sustained high growth?

I know these are tough questions that would themselves invite much controversy; but I believe that we have put off discussing such tough questions long enough. If we are going to honestly and effectively address these various needs, we can not simply punt them to the next Planning group; we must begin addressing them in earnest now. The changing climate is obvious to nearly everyone, and it is a game-changer. We must be much smarter in adapting to the emerging realities.

Respectfully,
Roger Hoffmann