

Diverting water is no answer for anyone

By RANDAL RISTAU
CSU Cooperative Extension

After spouting off last week about water belonging in its watershed of origin, you might think we would move on to other topics. However, due to some reader responses, let's go after this topic a little bit more.

One reader shared an article from last week's High Country News, a general Western living newspaper. It seems that the folks in the Gunnison Basin have been fending off sponges for their water as well.

Maybe saying sponges is a little too strong a tone, but fairly accurate. Sponges take water from one place and move it to another.

In this case, Arapahoe County was seeking to divert 60,000 acre-feet of water through a 42-mile aqueduct underneath the Continental Divide. The water would have been collected in a reservoir and then sent through the aqueduct. The proposed effort was called the Union Park Project.

This water battle has been brewing most of this decade and even some before. After a few rulings and appeals including the Colorado Supreme Court, the water seems to be remaining in its watershed of origin.

The lower court's decision by Judge Robert Brown was basically that the water rights in question were for in-basin use only. It seems we would all be better off if that was a little more standard way of thinking.

Please don't misunderstand me. I realize that water law can be very complicated in assuring the rights of all the parties are properly protected. However, cases of water being moved from one basin to another should not even exist.

Many diversions have been successful from a technical standpoint. However, we can never be sure of the impacts on the natural resources, agriculture, local economy, and etc. in the area of the source of water. This concern is especially true regarding the impact many years in the future.

Plus, the excessive impact of the conveyance of the diverted water is not a small concern. Leaving the water in its watershed eliminates the need to build pipelines, aqueducts, or other mechanisms to transport the water. Also, when moving hundreds or thousands of acre-feet of water, these engineering feats will not be small, nor fool proof. How would you like to have a pipeline as a neighbor, especially uphill from you?!!

By the way, Arapahoe County probably is done appealing. Recent changes in the county leadership have changed their viewpoint on the Project. A commissioner was quoted that the leadership would not have started the effort and that an unfavorable decision (for them) was not a surprise.

Sane minds still exist! I hope such sanity will be prevalent as the sponges descend into our watershed.

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MOVE THE PEOPLE: A sage irrigation specialist once said that the people should move to where the water is plentiful instead expecting the water they want being moved to them. Interesting concept that also has some concerns... really the issue boils down to proper management of what the resources a region is given naturally, especially when the resource in question is renewable, like water.

WEED WHIPPIN' TIME: Late in the growing season, perennial weeds are starting to actively store up root reserves so applying translocated herbicides becomes very effective. The next few weeks are probably the best for such applications this year.