

Get the Facts

Response to Pueblo Chieftain Editorial

A July 25, 2010 editorial in the Pueblo Chieftain accuses a Colorado Springs Utilities employee of “arrogance” for describing the decades-old trend of agricultural water rights being transferred to use by a number of Colorado cities, including Pueblo, as a reflection of how capitalism works.

The comment, by Wayne Vanderschuere, who is the El Paso County Municipalities’ representative on the Arkansas Basin Roundtable, came during a Roundtable discussion of a study on a proposed method for incorporating rural population-business thresholds, or “tipping points, in water transfers.

Numerous shortcomings of the study were pointed out by members of the Roundtable. Vanderschuere’s comment is an accurate description of one of the major forces that has led to the transfer of agricultural water to municipal use -- farmers and ranchers deciding it was more profitable to sell their water rights than continuing to ranch and farm their land.

The Chieftain erroneously cites the failure of Crowley County’s sugar beet industry in the 1980s as an example of agriculture being “devastated by the dry-up of the Colorado Canal primarily by Colorado Springs and Aurora.” The Chieftain ignores the fact that the sugar beet industry in Crowley County failed before any move to use water from the county for municipal use, not the other way around. The Chieftain also failed to report the fact that some of the water from Crowley County went to Pueblo. And while attacking Colorado Springs for “raids on Lower Arkansas Valley water,” the Chieftain does not report Pueblo’s purchase earlier this year of agricultural water rights from the Bessemer Ditch.

Colorado Springs has not and is not pursuing agricultural water rights and works cooperatively with agricultural interests in the Valley to explore ways that agriculture and urban water interests can work together.

The Chieftain, a longtime opponent of the Southern Delivery System, also used the occasion of its latest anti-SDS editorial to claim once again that SDS is no longer needed – giving as its latest reason, the slow-down of construction in the Banning-Lewis Ranch development.

Colorado Springs Utilities water demand forecast, which reflects current economic conditions, shows Colorado Springs will need the water provided by SDS as early as the year 2016. To meet these needs, construction will begin on SDS this year.

The Chieftain also ignores some important facts about SDS.

- An added benefit of SDS is the additional reliability it will add to Colorado Springs’ water system. That added reliability will ensure an uninterrupted flow of water in case other portions of our system must be closed for repair or maintenance. The Homestake Pipeline, which supplies more than half of Colorado Springs’ water, has had to be closed for repairs twice in recent years – once in 2006 and again in April of this year. In both cases, repairs were completed quickly. But a longer outage could have caused major disruption to the city’s water supply.
- We have committed to using SDS maximizing our existing water rights and to manage water exchanges with ranchers and farmers in a way that will make it easier for them to benefit from their water rights.