

The Gazette

Water bank would modernize outdated management rules

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We remember the recent drought, but it's nice to see the afternoon showers and the reservoir levels almost back to normal. Disaster has been averted, right?

Unfortunately, our water issues are a bit more complex. We wrestle with many water allotments and rights that are almost a century old in a political tug-of-war between densely populated cities, expanding agribusiness, massive industry and environmental watchdog groups. Never mind the fact that we don't know when there will be shortfalls or droughts.

These factions waging political warfare tend to create a worse quagmire as each group blocks legislation they view as unfavorable. In our current situation, it's like barely managing to grease the squeakiest wheel on a rusty, 75-year-old jalopy pulling a semi-trailer. We ignore the flat tires and oil leaks while piling on more cargo and fighting to make sure others don't get their hands under the hood to mess things up for us.

Whether we like it or not, the old clunker won't get us much farther. What we need to do is build a vehicle that is going to get this load over the next few hills. That is why we are proposing Aqua Bucks.

Change makes people nervous. Speaking out about this kind of thing can make you pretty unpopular at dinner parties. We like to shield ourselves from these issues and enjoy the extravagance of watering our lawns. Isn't this somebody else's problem?

Water management has gotten terribly complex and outdated and becoming more so each year. It is time to provide the means and incentives for such things as moderating usage, improving water quality, monetizing water rights or trading access across drainage basins.

What if you could "bank" your water rights on years you let some fields lay fallow? What if you could easily transfer your ditch rights to help pay off your house?

What if industries were simply charged

for polluting and paid for purification? Businesses are pretty good at figuring out how to maximize their profits. Why don't we put that ingenuity to work in our favor?

Instead of saddling businesses with heavy regulation, Aqua Bucks creates capital and liquidity as well as money-making opportunities.

What steps are required to get this process moving?

- Establish a co-operative water bank.
- Assemble a statewide database of water and ditch rights.
- Ascertain the value of water rights based on historical and current market rates.
- Institute a system for ongoing accounting for transfers, ownership, usage, improvements, pollution and purity.
- Design a system of rewards for constructive behaviors (such as conservation, clean-up, usage reduction, and re-use of gray water).
- Design a corresponding system of penalties for detrimental behaviors (such as overuse, polluting and waste).

Launching a water currency has immediate advantages. People not using their allotments will be able to more easily lease or sell them. Entrepreneurs will have new incentives to find ways to conserve and clean up our water supplies. During droughts, water usage could be traded to areas of greater need.

Aqua Prima has been established as a public charity to foster new discourse, technology and plans for ensuring that we have a future which includes safe water for our children, wildlife and food growth.

When the regional leaders and pundits meet in Gunnison this month, we would like for them to consider this approach. Unleashing people's innovation through healthy incentives creates a force to be reckoned with. Let's harness that power for our collective benefit instead of continuing the clash of different agendas.

Flobeck is CEO of Aqua Prima Center, Inc. Brock is a currency advisor for Aqua Prima and systems architect. For more information about Aqua Bucks and ways to preserve healthy water, visit www.aquaprima.org.

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