

Population growth, water use in desert

Written by Raymond Kuehne Writers Group

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Two Writers Group members wrote recently about Dixie's water future, and I want to build upon their excellent columns. Kristine Crandall reminded us that annual precipitation in our southwestern desert is declining, while total water consumption is increasing with population growth.

As a result, our water reserves are declining faster than they can reasonably be augmented. These trends will continue. However, she also reminded us of a report by Western Resource Advocates that shows how future needs can be met, at least until 2060, with greater conservation, reuse and transfers from agriculture, all without a Lake Powell pipeline.

The WRA report used the latest estimates from the governor's Office of Planning and Budget, which lowered Washington County's 2060 population from 860,000 to 498,000. However, our county water district, Washington County Water Conservancy District, ignores both the governor's new estimates and the WRA report. Instead, it focuses on building a pipeline to a risky source 129 miles away and spends millions to justify that project. Meanwhile, the promise that residents will not have to pay for the pipeline has been forgotten.

Enter Don Triptow's humorous vision of our future Dixieville: an uncompleted but expensive Lake Okeechobee pipeline, frog-jumping contests in the WCWCD's million dollar Calaveras Garden behind its multi-million dollar palace, and area officials contenting themselves with ice cream "Hope Floats."

Expensive demonstration gardens, "hope floats" and dreams of a green desert won't solve our water problem. But why assume the financial burden of a multi-billion dollar pipeline to a shrinking Lake Powell when better alternatives exist?

The first step must be acceptance and implementation of the WRA recommendations. Next, we must recognize and resolve two conflicting facts: Our climate is changing, and excessive population growth will eventually overwhelm even the WRA plan.

Washington County can do little to alter global climate trends, and we have discussed the problems of unrestrained population growth in the past, without results. But the oncoming water crisis presents new challenges and opportunities.

In brief, we must reduce the adverse impact of future population growth on water resources, and specifically, we must shift the cost and the risk of living in this increasingly dry desert onto those who wish to move here in the future. One way that can be done is to approve and implement new building codes and technology that will enable the WCWCD to strictly limit average monthly water use in all homes built after 2015 to amounts needed for internal use only. Such building codes can reduce the growth rate of water consumption and encourage some potential residents to locate where water is more plentiful.

It's time to discuss these and other prudent and fiscally conservative measures to conserve our

existing water supply.

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