

Improving Water Management in Washington County Tom Butine – President, Conserve Southwest Utah

CSU's position is that Washington County, and the state of Utah, must significantly improve their water management practices to meet the water demand of its growing population in the face of reducing water supplies. Our current rate of use cannot be sustained. Our water agencies are over-focused on increasing our water supply, which flies in the face of reduced supplies, driven by drought and general aridification of the Colorado Plateau caused by Climate Change, and under-focused on improving how we manage the water we have. This is a strategic blunder and huge management failure.

“Improved water management” means implementing standard program planning processes that would define goals, the strategies for achieving them, the criteria for evaluating possible solutions/actions, the derivation and selection of those solutions, and then the implementation of them. This would be done in a very open and transparent fashion, easily audited and accounted.

Almost none of these elements are in place now in our water agencies at the state and local level, at least in a manner that is detectable and transparent. The Lake Powell Pipeline project sponsored by Utah's Division of Water Resources (DWRe), is one of the worst-managed projects I have seen in my long and broad experience, and the program planning that caused it to be started is apparently non-existent. It would not survive a management audit. Local water conservation planning follows the DWRe's guidelines which include none of the standard program and project management processes and are therefore poorly directed. All the money goes into the LPP, with little left over for proper planning and implementation of water conservation.

CSU is proposing a “Washington County Integrated Water Management Plan”, which would cover all the water in the county (agriculture, municipal and industrial), managing both the water supply and demand, integrating the water district and the other water suppliers in the county. At its heart is determining the water supply available for us to use, followed by the setting of a goal for our water demand at some point in the future, ensuring our demand (use of water) is safely less than our supply. A recent DWRe study aimed at determining an appropriate goal for our demand is filled with issues (ref our comment paper), and sets a demand without determining the supply. Once an appropriate goal is set, the program planning activity would set about the business of determining how to achieve it.

Our current demand (use) is about 300 gallons per capita daily (GPCD), including what we use in our home and each of our shares of water used by businesses and institutions (e.g., schools, churches, city parks, etc.), not including agriculture. The recent goal set by the DWRe is 259 GPCD by 2065, a mere 0.3% reduction per year. We suspect the goal must be more like 175 GPCD in order for us to not run out of water. A huge difference.

Here are some examples of what we expect a proper program plan would identify as effective ways to achieve the goal:

- **Make the price we pay for water more reflective of how much water we use.** Currently our water is paid in roughly equal parts by property taxes, fees on new construction and our water bills. The first two have nothing to do with how much water we use, and the biggest water users are institutions that pay no taxes. Our

water bills, which are the only indication of how much water we use, are generally so low that we don't pay much attention. The idea would be to shift much more of what we pay for water to how much water we use. There are several cheap and easy ways to do this, and it has been shown to have dramatic effects.

- **Increase re-use of water**

Almost all the water we use can be recycled into drinkable water or secondary (irrigation) water and sent back to us to use.

- **Use secondary water to irrigate our landscaping**

Most of our landscape irrigation uses culinary (drinkable) water. We could use much more plentiful secondary water.

- **Require more water sensitive landscaping and better landscape irrigation**

Our 300 GPCD is culinary water, roughly 80% of it used for landscaping. Most of the landscaping that will be here in 2060 is not here yet. We should, right now, require water-wise landscaping, and move toward using secondary water for all landscape irrigation. If we want this to be a viable place to live in the future, we must move toward little or no grass in our yards and very wisely placed grass in our parks and playgrounds; golf courses must become desert courses.

- **Shift to less water-intensive agricultural**

About 70% of all our water is used in agriculture, largely in alfalfa for cattle feed, much of it exported. We are in essence exporting our water. Many of our farms and ranches rely on wells, and they are depleting the aquifers, taking more water out than comes in. This needs close monitoring and control.

This path of Integrated Water Management is one we hope to take, with the agreement of our local governments and water managers, and we need your support.