

We need to talk about water supply

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I have to admit that it was difficult to read John Fleck's article, "Farms, bosque biggest water users along Rio Grande." Fleck evokes a level of urgency, even though the data used to make the claim is uncertain.

The immediate question when I read this article was why is he writing about a report that has data that is uncertain? At the end, however, Bruce Thomson's comments about dialogue assure us that it is not that something has to give in, but rather that we need to dialogue about water use.

The essential questions are do we – or can we? – want to be another super urban city in the middle of the desert? Is it appropriate to get rid of agriculture and to lose any chances of having some kind of food security?

As it is, New Mexico only produces 3 percent of its food locally. So do we need to have a conversation about how water needs to be allocated and what makes sense here in our region?

Yes we do.

After four years of drought, cities in the Rio Grande Valley of central New Mexico have water stored in Heron, El Vado and Abiquiu reservoirs. In general, the water distribution is as follows: Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority (city use), 63 percent; Prior and Paramount (agriculture), 5 percent; Middle Rio Grande Conservation District (agriculture), 12 percent; San Juan Chama contractors, 10 percent; and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Project Storage, 9 percent.

So how are farming and the bosque the great users of water when ABCWUA is the greater water holder!

As of June 20, all the watershed basins in New Mexico have melted out and native flows have slowed to the point that MRGCD water bank irrigators would most likely have their water cut off. The MRGCD has only 12 percent of the water stored and is now dependent on native flows to maintain irrigation.

If monsoon rains don't deliver as expected, irrigation will be curtailed for the remainder of the season, except for the pueblos. Do we foresee any of the cities cutting the hours they deliver water to the public? Of course not.

The Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Authority has the most water stored due to years of not using its annual water allocation of 482,000 acre-feet/year from the San Juan Chama diversion; however, for the past four years, since the beginning of the Drinking Water Project, they have not been able to use their full allocation due to low river flows and have had to continue to resort to pumping water out of the aquifer to meet demands.

Farmers and the bosque do not have this option.

As the Rio Grande dries up, the farmers and the endangered species are being threatened with extinction while cities continue to grow and consume more water.

So, yes, let's dialogue.

And let's avoid jumping quickly on assumptions and data that might skew the discussion in favor of more pavement before we discuss the need for more trees, not fewer.