

QUOTELINES

"Enough of our money is already diverted to other parts of the country. We don't want our water to be diverted as well."

Water to America is like blood to the human body. Without it, we cannot grow or even survive. And we are quickly reaching the point of crisis."

— Sen. Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz.

"It's necessary at a state and local level for those who ultimately use the water; they're the ones who should make the decisions."

— Mitchell Snow, U.S. Department of Interior

"When the well's dry, we know the worth of water."

— Poor Richard's Almanac, 1733

"A man in the west will fight over three things: Water, women and gold, and usually in that order."

— Sen. Barry M. Goldwater, R-Ariz.

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"USA TODAY hopes to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to help make the USA truly one nation."

— Allen H. Neuharth
Chairman and Founder
Sept. 15, 1982

John Seigenthaler
Editorial Director

John C. Quinn
Editor

OPINION

The Debate: WATER WARS

Today's debate includes our opinion that a national water policy is needed to sort out conflicts over water among states and competing interests, an opposing view from Wisconsin, other views from California, Montana, and Texas, and voices from across the USA.

States must share if all are to prosper

Oh, for a magic wand to move the nation's water where we need it.

We use 450 billion gallons of water a day — 2,000 gallons for every American — but more than twice that much is available through stream flow alone. Add ground water to that, and you'd think we'd be in good shape.

But we aren't. Those who have water are hoarding it, and those who don't have it are greedy for it. Most of our water is in the East, South and Great Lakes areas. But more and more people are moving West. That migration, combined with large-scale irrigation, means that the dry West uses more water per person than any other region.

Water shortages in the West are occurring more often. Colorado River Basin water is being used faster than nature can replenish it. The Ogallala aquifer, a huge underground lake that stretches from Texas to South Dakota, is being sucked dry by 200,000 wells.

Not surprisingly, there are fierce fights for water:

- Southern California is battling Arizona for Colorado River water and northern California for its runoffs.
- New Mexico is fighting Texas and Colorado for the use of both surface and underground water.
- Great Lakes states are organizing to head off possible raids by arid western states.

So far, there's been little federal intervention. The Reagan administration has left it up to the states and the courts to decide how water resources are allocated.

Clearly, the scope of water wars today — and the potential for conflict tomorrow — demand national attention. Recognizing this, six members of Congress last year formed a bipartisan National Water Alliance and included corporate and environmental representatives. By mid-1985, it hopes to adopt a national water use plan, much of which would need state or congressional action.

The alliance wants to develop its plan outside government, to avoid the shifting winds of politics that can undermine federal strategy. As helpful as the alliance may become, the time has come for the federal government to take the lead. That doesn't mean we need a cabinet-level department, but we desperately need a national policy.

The nation can't wait for desalinization or other futuristic solutions. Washington has no magic wand that can move reservoirs across state lines. Supplies will continue to dwindle. Instead of fighting it out in the courts, the states should be sharing this most precious resource.

Water is essential to industrial might, to agricultural plenty, to life itself. The country thirsts for a national policy, not the chaos that inevitably results from state and regional conflict. Only that will assure that water flows freely for all Americans.