

## **Draining Antero: the ultimate Big-Gulp (June 26, 2002)**

It's a pretty helpless feeling when you know all you can do is sit, scratch your head and watch the life blood being sucked out of you. This is a very unsettling image, but it does characterize the tone set by the Denver Water Board a week ago with the announcement that the Antero Reservoir would be drained.

We wish we didn't have to admit the obvious: the water gushing through the Antero floodgate and momentarily swelling the salt marshes in South Park doesn't belong to Park County. It belongs to Denver, a self-proclaimed oasis in the high plains desert called Colorado. Rights to the majority of water flowing downstream were sold long ago by South Park ranchers.

Despite this understanding, Park County residents are getting a clear message from Denver. We are looked upon as stepchildren, not particularly worthy of interest or concern. Perhaps the Denver Water Board's actions would sit a little better with us if a real water emergency existed in Denver. We know, however, by the board's own statements, that more than 50 percent of all water used in the metro area is used for landscaping. Human and animal hydration, a literal question of life and death, has taken a back seat to emerald lawns and abundantly watered sidewalks. We see a car wash on every corner where a bucket and sponge would be more appropriate.

The Denver Water Board has shown its true stripes by arrogantly stating that the impact of the drainage on Park County isn't even a relevant issue for discussion. By inference, Denver Water is saying to Park County, "It's your problem, deal with it." The board also stated that it has no responsibility to mitigate for economic and environmental impacts which will be felt by Park County residents whose livelihoods were connected to Antero.

So we are left high and dry by the water barons to climb out of the muck and get on with things. We woke up last week and found ourselves in the middle of a new water war. And unless a concerted effort is made to protect our diminishing water resources, we're going to find ourselves face down in the dust after the high noon showdown with Denver.

While there is nothing we can do to reclaim the rights we have historically lost, let's channel the heat of the moment into constructive protection of our diminishing resources. We learned a valuable lesson during the South Park conjunctive Use Project trial: Park County does not have to be turned into a mud hole and blow away in the wind. Even more important, the case taught us we can prevail when we throw our time, intestinal fortitude, and yes financial resources, at it.

It's time for a dialogue, not a monologue, with the powers that be. There's a saying that originated when the West was settled that we should heed. "He who controls the water controls the land." This is no longer a cliché.

-- Lora Abcarian