

# 2012 drought emphasizes need for storage

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*Opinion by Barbara Kirkmeyer, Weld County Commissioner*

Water has always been a valued resource especially by the farmers and ranchers who settled the American West. The pioneers who homesteaded in northern Colorado recognized the value of water and its importance not only for survival but also for prosperity on the eastern plains. Their foresight on water use and management, from irrigation systems to the Big Thompson Water Project, has allowed this area to thrive.

Today, Weld County agriculture is a \$1.5-billion industry; our farmers and ranchers contribute greatly to the state's economy by providing food to the world.

This year in northern Colorado, as forest fires and drought plague the region with unrelenting persistence, we are once again reminded of the value of water; we are reminded of the value of agriculture.

More importantly, perhaps, we are reminded of the need for water storage. In a year with low snow-pack, little precipitation and record-breaking heat, water is scarce. Agriculture is threatened. Our economy is threatened. The farms and ranches that have prospered in years past are struggling as water supplies to help them through the dry years dwindle.

As we are witnessing this summer, we cannot afford to wait until another emergency occurs before we address the issue of water storage. Drought has happened before, it is happening now and it will happen again. We need to stop kicking the bucket down the road and instead find a way to set the bucket upright and fill it — with water — for future use. It is the only way we can ensure continued prosperity of our agricultural heritage and our economic future.

On July 24, communities will come together to support efforts to move water storage projects forward; to set the bucket upright, if you will. Farmers, ranchers, municipalities, legislators and elected officials will gather at the historic Fort Lupton for a support rally for NISP, the Northern Integrated Supply Project. NISP directly addresses water storage issues by proposing the building of two new water storage reservoirs: Galeton Reservoir and Glade Reservoir.

NISP will protect our agricultural economy by allowing the storage of water currently leaving Colorado in wet years and making it available in dry years. It will relieve pressures felt by farmers and ranchers to sell water rights to our growing municipalities by providing a reliable water supply for 15 northeastern Colorado communities. It will allow this region to continue to grow and prosper.

When Lancaster Lupton constructed his trading post in 1837, he built it along the banks of the South Platte River. According to South Platte Historical Society records, the river was known by the Cheyenne as the Tallow River and was "synonymous with good eating and therefore good times." So it seems fitting that the river and the historic Fort Lupton will serve as the stage for this year's NISP rally where we will be reminded once again of the historical importance of water in this area for both

our agricultural industry and our growing communities.

Without water management, including water storage, the ability to continue to support our thriving agricultural industry will diminish. "Good eating" and "good times" will be harder to come by.

We invite you to join us at the historic Fort Lupton on July 24 to learn about the history of water in the West and be reminded of the value water has for our future. The program event runs from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The program, which features many speakers including Hank Brown, begins at noon. Parking is available on site and lunch will be provided. The Fort Lupton Historical Park is located west of Highway 85 off of 14th Ave.

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