

Tribune Opinion: We must do more to conserve water

Greeley Tribune Opinion

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We agree with Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture John Salazar when he said last week that a combination of conservation and new water storage are needed to solve an impending catastrophe for farmers and ranchers.

Salazar was referring to a projected 600,000 acre-foot water shortage that is expected to hit Colorado by the year 2050.

Speaking at last week's Colorado Farm Show, Salazar said municipal users, including those of us who apply a vast amount of water to our Kentucky bluegrass, must get smarter about water consumption. He also said farmers and ranchers must take better advantage of technology to do a better job of conserving water. And he said, too, that water-storage projects (can you say Northern Integrated Supply Project?) must be part of the state's 50-year water plan.

We agree on all three accounts.

Salazar's message hits home with extra impact this winter. Statewide snowpack is sitting at 67 percent of average, and many of the state's reservoirs already range from near empty to two-thirds full. Unless the final three months of the winter provide bountiful snow, Colorado could very well be facing the reality of a water shortage starting this summer.

Salazar pointed out that Coloradans consume about 120 gallons of water every day. Australians, by comparison, use 36 gallons per day. That stark difference points out that more can, and must, be done to conserve the water we use on an everyday basis. Those who grow crops certainly must be participants in that, and we know from previous coverage that some Weld County farmers already are converting to drip irrigation systems, which save a considerable amount of water compared to the conventional flood irrigation. Residential water users must do a better job of embracing xeriscaping and reducing other household water consumption, and we know that Greeley has been among the state's leaders in securing significant water savings over the past few years.

But we must do more.

And that includes building more water storage. The NISP project in northern Colorado is one of the most responsible, common-sense water storage projects this state has seen in decades. It has to win the approval of federal regulatory agencies, but we would expect that to happen within a few years and hopefully construction can start soon thereafter.

Salazar said "massive cooperation" must occur for the state to meet its future water needs. We would agree, and if we don't, we're likely to encounter a massive water problem.