

Water Concerns

Quoting Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner “water; water everywhere never a drop to drink”. There is a significant amount of misinformation regarding the geological nature of the Denver Basin and the number of productive aquifers. During the last quarter century, many Elbert County citizens have stated, “Everybody knows that the county is running out of water.” Such statements, although not factual, are usually by individuals trying to justify desired outcomes based upon their belief that:

- A) The development of neighboring lands will negatively affect existing individual wells.
- B) Limit growth. “Keep Elbert County rural.”
- C) There is limited water available in the County. Therefore, any new large capacity well must be discouraged.
- D) There is no life without adequate water. Do not take the risk!

Commissioners determined in 2017 that they did not have adequate scientific data to facilitate analysis of water availability, projected consumption, number of aquifers or their location. They commissioned a Rural Water Supply Study, completed in June 2018, prepared by Forsgren Associates, Inc., which focused on the North West portion of the county where future housing developments will likely be located.

The study helped identify probable future sources of water supply for lands located in the north-west portion of Elbert County:

- A) The import of renewable water is possible but is currently not cost effective. In addition, El Paso and Douglas County have more resources available to purchase this type of supply.
- B) Transfer of significant volumes of agricultural use water is unlikely due to the limited amount of irrigated lands located within Elbert County. There are minimal amounts of this type of water that might become available.
- C) There are two primary sources of water available for future development in Elbert County; aquifer water and reuse of treated water. Aquifer sourced water will be more than 85% of future projected supply.

The Study identified potential aquifer water availability in the North West developing part of the County and compared this with projected population growth as forecasted by the Colorado State Demographer. It was determined that there is approximately 54 million acre feet of aquifer water located in the studied area and projected consumption is expected to average less than 9500 acre feet per year between now and 2050. Over the next 44 years, citizens in the North West area will consume a total of about 417,000 acre-feet of water resulting in 53.6 million acre feet of water remaining available in 2050.

The above noted facts and conclusions provide confidence that the County has significant water resources available. It is important, however that County take reasonable action to ensure that

every effort to effectively conserve water to maximize future water availability. The County has taken the following actions since January 2017 to ensure best uses of its water:

- A) Continued to budget funds to facilitate monitoring of water well static pressures by The United States Geological Survey (USGS). This provides critical information to County Staff to monitor well consumption and possible aquifer depletion.
- B) Included in the recently adopted Subdivision Regulations, every new development has to demonstrate that it has adequate water dedications, as determined by the Colorado Department of Water Resources to supply the fully developed Community for 300 years. A recent subdivision approval included a provision that the developer may not export any water outside the subdivision without prior County approval.
- C) All new subdivisions will complete their high capacity water wells in an aquifer that is deeper than most of the existing water wells in the area. Most existing households obtain their water from the shallowest Dawson aquifer. The developer must complete their high capacity wells in the Denver Aquifer or other deeper aquifers and thus will not affect existing household wells.
- D) Included in the new regulations is Conservation Community language that encourages large open space areas, cluster development, and efficient aquifer use by rewarding reuse of water and better conservation practices.
- E) Elected officials, Staff and other interested parties attended a three-day seminar titled "Growing Water Smart". Attendees learned many positive water management practices. Subsequent to this seminar, Elbert County has received a \$10,000 grant from DOLA to facilitate working with local municipalities, regional water districts and other service providers to develop a collaborative water conservation program. This will assist the County to evaluate possible impacts caused by surrounding counties and Elbert County incorporated municipalities.

The best way to ensure the future of Elbert County is to manage activity within the county through professional planning. Elbert County Government will ensure that "Water; Water everywhere ever a drop to drink".

Grant Thayer

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