



City of Grand Junction
Clifton Water District
CSU Cooperative Extension
Town of Palisade
Ute Water Conservancy District

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Water conservation requires careful planning, research

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Special to the Sentinel

As executive director of the Great Western Institute, I believe that what we do not know about water conservation is a lot. Most people believe that saving water through wise and efficient water use is a good thing. Some areas, such as the Grand Valley, have had effective water-conservation programs for years. But saving water just for the heck of it may not make much sense.

There can be unintended consequences from reducing water use. In fact, if everyone suddenly started saving a lot of water, water providers could find their budgets in a shortfall from lack of revenue. This causes problems with maintaining a water system and paying employees when less money is made. In agriculture, if a farmer saves water by reducing irrigation use it may also detrimentally impact others. Water users that depend on the farmer's wastewater to provide return flows to a river they use may not have as much water as they used to count on.

So how do water managers walk the conservation tightrope using water wisely and efficiently without unintended consequences?

Conservation starts with education. In water conservation, education comes from the open and honest sharing of stories and anecdotes between interested and engaged parties, since successful water conservation is ultimately location specific and may vary widely from region to region.

What works for Grand Junction may or may not be good for Clifton, which may be different from Vail or Alamosa or Greeley.

Water conservation is driven by the need to save water and the means to manage saved water. Senior direct water rights may require entirely different water-savings measures and programs than do groundwater rights or storage rights. What works in older communities may or may not work in newer communities. Solutions to water conservation are as varied as the cost of an acre-foot of water in Colorado (varying from less than a few hundred dollars to more than \$20,000 in some places).

To this end, a group of water managers and individuals from the Grand Valley and across Colorado gathered at the Mesa County Fairgrounds last month to find out what they had in common and what interests they shared. I suspect that this workshop was only the start of the dialogue. Look for more water conservation workshops to happen in the coming years as needs grow and solutions are developed. Visit www.thedripwebsite.com for solutions you can use at home.

We live in a semiarid climate where droughts will always be a part of our environment. Water for our future means conserving now. The Drought Response Information Project (DRIP) is a collaboration between the valley's domestic water utilities and CSU Cooperative Extension to provide information and educate the public about drought and the importance of water conservation.