

Our Water Crisis: Too Big For Even a Czar

Susan J. Marks

Journalist, Author, Aqua Shock

Posted: October 19, 2009 12:26 PM

On the net at: Huffington Post

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-j-marks/our-water-crisis-too-big_b_325962.html

Forget the current obsessing over President Obama's appointments of czars and czarinas to solve all that ails the nation.

In at least one area, America's growing water crisis, the appointment of a federal water chief is a pipe dream at best, and an unacceptable approach at worst. That's the consensus coast to coast of water controllers, educators, experts, and individuals, who offered their take on the current water crisis for my just-released book, *Aqua Shock: The Water Crisis in America* (Bloomberg).

In fact, as supplies of the planet's once infinite resource dry up, the bottom line is: any move to take control of water to the national level will meet fierce resistance. How fierce? The nation's debate over health care will seem like a tea party, still more experts concur. Those who have plenty of water, and even those who don't, bristle at the thought of losing control of "their" water.

The reasons: Water is personal -- every human being and all other living things on this planet need water to survive. Water is local -- traditionally water has been the purview of individual and local officials. Water is regional and state-controlled, too. In many cases state engineers and regional watershed districts determine who gets how much water, when, and for how long.

The feds also have a stake in the nation's water supplies with more than 20 different agencies involved in managing some aspect of water in this country, according to Mike Hightower, water expert, environmental engineer, and Distinguished Member of the Technical Staff for Sandia National Laboratories, part of the Nuclear Security Administration. Sandia pays attention to water as a national security issue because approximately 250 transnational boundaries -- including our borders with Mexico and Canada -- involve water, says Hightower.

"If you want to touch off fireworks for the next millennium, push that concept of national control of water," Roger Sims, past chair of the Florida Bar Environmental and Land Use Law Section and member of the American Bar Association Standing Committee on Environmental Law, says in *Aqua Shock*.

Given all the hands in the nation's water pot, the idea of a national water czar with real control and power may not be in the cards. But what the Obama administration has done is appoint a number of water specialists to high-level posts. Some of those mini-czar appointees include:

Ken Salazar, native Coloradan, former senator, and water and environmental attorney, as Secretary of the Interior.

David J. Hayes, retired attorney specializing in energy, environment, and resources, as deputy Interior secretary and water czar for California.

Cameron Davis, then president and CEO of the Alliance for the Great Lakes, as special adviser to the U.S. EPA overseeing its Great Lakes restoration plan.

John Tubbs, a longtime Montana water resources administrator, as deputy assistant Interior secretary for water and science.

Anne Castle, then prominent Denver water attorney, as assistant secretary of the Interior for water and science.

What the president hopes these appointees will or won't accomplish remains to be seen. More certain, however, is the inevitable sum of our nation's water equation:

Growing demand + Limited supply = Shortage and conflict over what's left.

Water is the new oil, except there is no alternative. We can't live without it.

The water crisis is here and now in our backyards, and in our homes.

The range of water issues is broad and includes mushrooming U.S. and global populations, shifts in those populations, places where water is in short supply, pollution--natural and manmade, extended drought and climate change, development practices that pave over and out Earth's natural ability to replenish itself, water overuse and lack of conservation, antiquated and worn-out infrastructure, and laws and enforcement, and more.

It will take much more than czars or czarinas to solve all these problems.