

EDITORIAL: The Murder and Resurrection of the Colorado River, Part Five

[Bill Hudson](#)

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I found a website, the other day, claiming that [tax evasion in the US is roughly equivalent to 75 percent of the federal deficit](#) — perhaps \$600 million a year. Considering the fact that 80 percent of taxpayers have their tax payments withheld from their paychecks — and have their income reported directly to the IRS — it's probably mainly self-employed entrepreneurs and wealthy folks living off their investments who are cheating on their taxes. That is to say, the people who have the most to gain are likely the ones lying about their tax obligations.

When it came to exaggerating the financial and environmental effects of federal water projects, it seemed like almost everyone at the US Bureau of Reclamation was willing to lie.

We ended Part Four on Friday with the statement that an overriding intention of the federal government, between 1902 and 1966, was to increase the settlement of the

American West, and one of the key elements of their strategy was the construction of dams and reservoirs for flood control, irrigation, and hydroelectricity — not necessarily in that order of importance.

At least, that *seemed* to be their intention. In many cases, however, the projects planned by the US Bureau of Reclamation made no sense at all to a rational person, once you had the actual financial, hydrological and geological data laid out on the table. In those cases, the Reclamation engineers and bureaucrats did their best to obfuscate the facts... or simply lie about them.

A certain amount of such obfuscation took place in 1966, as the Bureau prepared to begin work on two new dams that would flood portions of the Grand Canyon (Bridge Canyon Dam) and reduce the Colorado River through the national park to a mere trickle (Marble Canyon Dam).

They were two pieces of the ambitious Pacific Southwest Water Plan.

The Bureau also had plans to build the Central Arizona Project (CAP) — a 331-mile canal that would deliver water from Lake Havasu to Phoenix and Tucson and central Arizona — but needed funds to pay for the canal and to operate its massive pumping stations. Bridge Canyon and Marble Canyon were meant to provide hydroelectric power

for the CAP. What the public was not told, however, was that the Bureau also planned to operate them as “cash register” dams, to raise money for a massive pipeline project starting at the Columbia River in Washington State, through a huge aqueduct that would one day serve to keep the Colorado River flowing, as the burgeoning populations of California, Arizona and Nevada did their best to drain the river dry. This enormous augmentation project — the Pacific Southwest Water Plan — was planned largely behind closed doors.



Fourteen years earlier, in 1952, a young mountain climber named David Brower had been hired as the only employee for the Sierra Club, a conservation-minded association headquartered in Berkeley, California. Following Brower’s efforts to stop the Echo Park Dam in Dinosaur National Monument, the club moved into national prominence, and when the plans to flood parts of the Grand Canyon were

announced, Brower and the Sierra Club developed a national PR campaign to defeat the planned dams.

The Sierra Club campaign was helped out by the work of a young and relatively unknown New Mexico mathematician named Jeffrey Ingram, who had a fascination with two critical aspects of the proposed dams: the Grand Canyon itself and the fraudulent numbers being distributed by the Bureau of Reclamation. According to Ingram's research, the CAP and the Bridge Canyon and Marble Canyon dams were going to be funded in part by the hydroelectric revenues coming from the already existing Hoover, Parker and Davis dams, once those dams had paid back their construction costs in the late 1980s. This was a violation of federal law. According to the law that created the Bureau of Reclamation, surplus power revenues were supposed to revert to the US Treasury, in order to compensate the taxpayers for forgiven interest obligations on Reclamation projects.

The other issue that Ingram discovered was that, because of the high cost of these new Colorado River projects, it would take literally decades for them to repay their construction costs using electricity sales and payments from irrigators and municipalities. So, by the time the projects were creating revenue that might be used to finance the Pacific Southwest Water Plan — to augment the

Colorado River with water from the Columbia River, a thousand miles away — the Colorado River would probably be drained dry.

In some ways, the battle to defeat the Grand Canyon dams marked the 'coming of age' for America's environmental movement. With the help of two prominent California advertising gurus, the Sierra Club took out full-page ads in the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. One of the ads in 1966 asked readers — rhetorically, of course — if we ought to flood the Sistine Chapel to allow tourists to get closer to Michelangelo's paintings.

SHOULD WE ALSO FLOOD THE SISTINE CHAPEL SO TOURISTS CAN GET NEARER THE CEILING?

EARTH began four billion years ago and Man two million. The Age of Technology, on the other hand, is hardly a hundred years old, and on our time chart we have been generous to give it even the little line we have.

It seems to us hasty, therefore, during this blip of time, for Man to think of directing his fascinating new tools toward altering irrevocably the forces which made him. Nonetheless, in these few brief years among four billion, wilderness has all but disappeared. And now these:

1) There are proposals *still* before Congress to "improve" Grand Canyon. If they succeed, two dams could back up artificial lakes into 93 miles of canyon gorge. This would benefit tourists in power boats, it is argued, who would enjoy viewing the canyon wall more closely. (See headline.) Submerged underneath the tourists would be part of the most revealing single page of earth's history. The lakes would be as



5) In San Francisco, real estate interests have for years been filling a bay that made the city famous, putting tract houses over the fill; and now there's a new idea — still more fill, enough for an air cargo terminal as big as Manhattan.

There exists today a mentality which can conceive such destruction, giving commerce as ample reason. For 74 years, the Sierra Club (now with 48,000 members) has opposed that mentality. But now, when even Grand Canyon is endangered, we are at a critical moment in time.

This generation will decide if something untrammelled and free remains, as testimony we had love for those who follow.

We have been taking ads, therefore, asking people to write their Congressmen and Senators; Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall; The President; and to send us funds to continue the battle. Thousands have written, but meanwhile

Concludes the advertisement:

This generation will decide if something untrammelled and free remains, as testimony we had love for those

who follow.

We have been taking ads, therefore asking people to write their Congressmen and Senators; Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall; the President; and to send us funds to continue the battle. Thousands have written, but meanwhile, Grand Canyon legislation still stands a chance of passage. More letters are needed and much more money, to help fight the notion that Man no longer needs nature.

The ad included a form that could be cut out and enclosed when you mailed your money to the Sierra Club.

A generation did respond, as did the media. *Reader's Digest* — a publication not generally known for its progressive tone — attacked the proposed dams. So did *Life* magazine.

"Then we got plastered by *My Weekly Reader*," explained Reclamation staffer Dan Dreyfus, as quoted in Marc Reisner's remarkable 1986 book, *Cadillac Desert*. "You're in deep shit when you catch it from them. Mailbags were coming in by the hundreds, stuffed with letters from school kids..."

The Marble Canyon Dam officially died in 1968 when President Lyndon Johnson signed a law creating the Marble Canyon National Monument. Bridge Canyon remained on

the drawing board until its official demise in 1984.

What these Bureau of Reclamation defeats indicated was not only the overreach of the Bureau and the ungodly increase in the cost of dam construction and water projects in general, but also the growing influence of the environmental movement. America had been happy, for almost 200 years, to trample the natural environment — landscapes, plant and animal species, and especially free-flowing rivers — in the name of human settlement in places where settlement required us to plunder the environment for relatively short-term profit.

America, it seems, was slowly coming to its senses in 1966. But not quickly enough to stop the Central Arizona Project.

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EDITORIAL: The Murder and Resurrection of the Colorado River, Part Two

[Bill Hudson](#)

[Read Part One](#)

The \$140-million mortgage, a loan from the US Treasury to build Hoover Dam, will be paid in full today. Residential and industrial users of electricity have been paying back the government \$5.4 million a year at 3% interest over the last 50 years as part of their monthly utility bills...

— From an article by Charles Hillinger in the Los Angeles Times, May 31, 1987

In 1921, when Colorado attorney Delph Carpenter brought forward his crazy idea, the Colorado River Compact — a multi-state agreement between the seven states dependent upon the Colorado River for its irrigation and drinking water — he was imagining a future Colorado fully populated with family-owned, irrigated farms and ranches, growing crops, raising livestock, and living gloriously independent lives. How far in the future this might be, he could not say; the population of the state in 1921 was about 960,000 people,

and more than a quarter of that population — 255,000 — lived in Denver.

By comparison, the population of California in 1921 was already around 3.8 million. Los Angeles County alone had a population as large as the entire state of Colorado. And Los Angeles, in the middle of a desert basin, was hungry for water. The city had already spent seven years, from 1906 until 1913, buying up water rights and building the then-longest aqueduct in the world — a pipeline that ultimately dry up the Owens River, 250 miles away. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power won voter approval for that aqueduct partly by secretly draining all of the local LA reservoirs into the Pacific Ocean, thereby creating the appearance of a municipal 'drought.'

Preliminary plans were already underway to build the Colorado River Aqueduct, which would ultimately drain 1.2 million acre feet per year out of the Colorado River.

Delph Carpenter and the rest of the political leadership in Colorado believed that their own 'Colorado Doctrine', granting perpetual 'first rights' to whatever water user first develops a water source, would leave Colorado and other slower-growing states in the 'Upper Basin' — Utah, New Mexico and Wyoming — without sufficient water to develop to their full water-based potential.

Sunday paid circulation of The Denver Post 100,000 greater than total paid circulation of all seventeen other Sunday papers printed in Denver and Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico combined.

Daily The Denver Post Sunday
159,249 Paid Circulation 245,030
for July
Denver's Population, 1925, Over 325,000

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DENVER, COLO., TUESDAY, SEPT. 1, 1925

20 PAGES



But rather than fight it out in the courts, Carpenter was determined to cobble together a compromise. In a rather

remarkable feat of diplomacy, he managed to get the seven states — California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming and Colorado — to approve the Colorado River Compact in 1922.

The agreement granted the Upper Basin states perpetual access to 7.5 million acre feet of water per year, with Colorado entitled to about half of that total. The three Lower Basin states were allocated the same amount — 7.5 million acre feet per year — with California getting almost two-thirds of that total.

So then, 15 million acre feet per year, split between the seven states. Enough for everyone. (Not every state was immediately happy with the agreement, however. Arizona did not sign the Compact until 1944.) Additionally, 1.5 million acre feet are allotted to Mexico in a different agreement. Grand total: 16.5 million acre feet, allocated to various parties. The allocation was to be measured at Lee's Ferry near Paige, AZ.

One little problem. The period used to calculate the "average" flow of the Colorado River (1905–1922) included years of abnormally high precipitation. Subsequent calculations estimated the historical flow of the Colorado River at perhaps 13.5 million acre feet per year. The annual flow at Lee's Ferry revealed itself to be extremely erratic, ranging from a low of 4 million acre feet to a high of 22

million acre feet, leading to an inability of the Upper Basin states to consistently meet the minimum delivery requirements to the Lower states in dry years, and to a “loss” of significant surpluses in wet years.

One of the bargaining chips in the Compact negotiations was a plan by the US Reclamation Service (later the Bureau of Reclamation) to build a 726 foot tall dam “for flood control and hydroelectric power” in the Black Canyon on the Nevada-Arizona border. The Lower Basin states favored the dam project; by agreeing to the dam concept, the Upper Basin states made a significant compromise — and moved the Compact towards approval.



Hoover Dam, wedged between Nevada and Arizona, on the Colorado River.

As noted at the beginning of this article, in 1987 electricity customers finished paying off the principal and interest for the Hoover Dam, completed in 1936. At a rate of \$5.4

million a year in electricity purchases, those customers apparently paid about \$270 million for a dam that originally cost \$49 million to build. (In 1987 dollars, the original construction cost would have been equivalent to about \$400 million.)

This project funding technique — using hydroelectricity generation to pay off the debt for dam construction, rather than expecting irrigation users to repay the cost of the project — had been tried before in the American West, and remained a favorite pattern for numerous future dams along the Colorado River and its tributaries. That river system now sports at least 45 major dams, built between 1911 and 2002. Many of them are generating hydroelectric power to justify their existence.

But Delph Carpenter's dream of a Colorado full of independent farmers and ranchers, benefitting from the Colorado River Compact, was focused on irrigated agriculture rather than electricity. It turned out to be not much more than that: a dream.

By the time the Compact was signed in 1922, most of the Colorado land suitable for irrigated agriculture had already been settled, and had acquired water rights. Colorado was heading into a very different future from what Delph Carpenter had imagined. Newcomers to the state, generally speaking, were settling in Denver and other urban areas.

The sugar beet industry — the number one crop in Colorado during the early 1900s — was already on its way out. The oil and gas industries were rising to prominence, as was manufacturing.

But in terms of water use in Colorado, agriculture remains king of the hill, even today.

Is that the state's saving grace?

Or it's worst problem?

[Read Part Three...](#)

EDITORIAL: The Murder and Resurrection of the Colorado River, Part Three

[Bill Hudson](#)

[Read Part One](#)

At the beginning of this year, the San Juan Water Conservancy District — holder of certain water rights and real estate on behalf of the District taxpayers — was doing some soul searching. Several years of work on a proposed reservoir in the Dry Gulch valley northeast of downtown Pagosa had convinced the SJWCD Board to ask the taxpayers in 2017 to increase the District's property tax mill levy to help facilitate the Dry Gulch project.

I serve on the SJWCD Board of Directors, but the following essay is not meant to reflect the policies or intentions of the SJWCD Board as a whole.

The ongoing plan to divert water from the San Juan River and store it in a nearby valley has been 'in-progress' for almost 20 years, but thus far, the project remains theoretical. Water rights — conditional upon the actual construction of the reservoir — have been granted by the Water Court, and some of the necessary real estate has

been purchase with money loaned by the Colorado Water Conservation Board, but a sizable portion of the desired land still remains in the hands of the US Forest Service.

Yesterday in Part Two, we noted that the Hoover Dam — the 726-foot dam that created the 26-million-acre-foot Lake Mead — had a construction cost of about \$49 million back in 1936. Converted to 2019 dollars, that would be equivalent to about \$600 million. The cost of the dam was reimbursed over a 50-year period by electricity users in California, Arizona and Nevada.

The cost of damming Lake Mead appears to have been about \$23 per acre foot of water storage, calculated in 2019 dollars.

Back in 2009, an estimated cost of the 32,000-acre-foot Dry Gulch Reservoir project was generated by a team of professional engineers: \$357 million. Had the project moved forward as planned in 2009, the cost might have been about \$11,200 per acre foot of storage. Apparently, the per-acre-foot cost of building a reservoir has inflated slightly since 1936.

[According to Wikipedia](#), there are about 59 dams and reservoirs in Colorado. Could Dry Gulch become the 60th... with the help of some additional taxpayer contributions? That was the basic question put before Archuleta County

voters in 2017. In spite of the SJWCD board of directors changing the name of the reservoir from 'Dry Gulch Reservoir' to 'The Upper San Juan River Headwaters Project' a few months before the election, the ballot measure failed.

What to do? A few months later, newly-appointed SJWCD Board member Matt Roane suggested that perhaps the Board could develop a "strategic plan" — a process likely to produce new ideas about the District's long range future, since the old ideas seemed to be going nowhere.

A 'Strategic Plan' process has indeed been underway this year, and rather than do what volunteer boards typically do when they want a plan developed — which is, typically, to use taxpayer revenue to pay a consultant from Denver to write the plan for them — the SJWCD decided to use the energy and expertise of the Board members themselves to write the plan. The Board also hired Renee Lewis Kosnik, formerly the District Manager for Pagosa Area Water and Sanitation (PAWSD) to help facilitate the planning process.

I'm personally pleased with this approach, because there's nothing quite like the process of writing an informative essay, if you want to learn more about the world you live in — or about the problems that you may be trying to solve.

Archuleta County residents, businesses, farms and ranches

draw most of their water from the San Juan River and its tributaries. The San Juan is a major tributary of the Colorado River, and the San Juan features a pretty impressive reservoir that commences in the southwest corner of the Archuleta County and heads south and west into New Mexico. Thanks to the Navajo Dam near Farmington, the Navajo Reservoir is the second largest body of water in New Mexico, next to Elephant Butte Reservoir, and features three developed recreation areas in New Mexico, and one in Archuleta County. It has a capacity of about 1.7 million acre-feet of stored water.



Navajo Dam, showing the spillway and hydroelectric installation.

Like all of the dams along the Colorado River, Navajo Reservoir and the irrigated farms it serves have helped decimate the native fish, birds, vegetation and wildlife species that once thrived, in and along the river, between its headwaters in the Rocky Mountains and the Colorado River

Delta in Mexico. The destruction was done, originally, in the name of agriculture and hydroelectricity, although a thorough study of water history suggests that much of the work of corralling the Colorado River took place primarily because the engineers and bureaucrats employed by the US Bureau of Reclamation wanted to keep busy.

Back in Parts One and Two, we briefly discussed Delph Carpenter, the Coloradan largely responsible for the 1922 Colorado River Compact. As a man with a farming and ranching background, Carpenter viewed the Colorado River — and all the rivers of the state — as sources for irrigation water, to facilitate agricultural development in places where Mother Nature would not normally allow it. Agriculture is still the primary human use of the Colorado River and the San Juan River in 2019, although numerous other uses have made their appearance over the years. Golf courses. Flushing indoor toilets. Manufacturing. Beer brewing. Rafting. Fly fishing. Automated car washes. And more recently, fracking.



One of the marinas at Navajo Lake.

But these auxiliary uses still can't hold a candle to agriculture, in terms of water consumption.

While working on the SJWCD strategic plan, I did some research into how we use water in Archuleta County, and I came upon a [US Geological Survey \(USGS\) website](#) detailing water consumption in Archuleta County. The most recent data comes from 2015.

USGS calculates that non-agricultural water consumption — residential, commercial, industrial — at about 2.44 million gallons per day, or about 2,700 acre feet per year. Their website refers to this water as 'Public Supply.'

"Irrigation" in Archuleta County uses about 47,000 acre feet per year.

According to my pocket calculator, farmers and ranchers account for slightly more than 94 percent of the water use in Archuleta County.

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Four

BY **BILL HUDSON** · OCTOBER
18, 2019

Read Part One

Some of our readers ought to have received their 2019 ballots in the mail by now, and may have already tossed them in the trash. No candidates appeared on the ballot, just two simple requests to boost Colorado state tax revenues.

Proposition CC, asks us to allow the state government to retain the TABOR refunds we've been getting — now and then — since 1992 when the Taxpayer Bill of Rights was voted into the Colorado constitution. CC claims it doesn't increase taxes, and in one sense, it doesn't increase the amount of any specific tax, but we will indeed pay more taxes — long into the future — because we will no



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An advertisement for Pagosa Source Real Estate Advisors. The background is a dark, textured brown. At the top, it says "Call 970-264-7000 to Join Our Listings..." in a gold, serif font. Below this is a rectangular image of a large, two-story wooden house with a porch, set against a backdrop of mountains and a blue sky with clouds. In the foreground of this image is a gold square icon with a white dollar sign. Below the image, the text "PAGOSA SOURCE" is written in a large, gold, serif font, with "REAL ESTATE ADVISORS" in a smaller, gold, sans-serif font underneath. At the bottom, it says "Click here to learn more..." in a gold, serif font.

longer have excessive taxes refunded to us. The measure doesn't guarantee how the extra money will be spent. Maybe on education and transportation? Maybe not.

Proposition DD admits that it's a tax increase, but only a tax increase on currently-illegal sports betting profits at Colorado casinos. If we pass DD, the state's gambling addicts will foot the bill for various as-yet-unidentified 'water' projects, long into the future.

A few days ago, we received a press release extolling the virtues of Proposition DD, that read in part:

Proposition DD isn't just a win for Colorado's water, it's a win for the state's economy – which is why the measure has drawn widespread support from chambers



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of commerce, industry groups and leading businesses in the state.

“Colorado’s snowpack, which provides the vast majority of our water, is projected to decrease by more than 50% by the end of this century. So it’s critical that we rally industry support now to protect and conserve water resources,” said Auden Schendler, Vice President of Sustainability, Aspen Skiing Company.

“My business depends on clean, abundant water, which is why I’m pleased to endorse Proposition DD. As our rivers and streams face growing challenges, including climate change and population increases, we must fund Colorado’s precious water



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resources,” said Sarah Tingey of Alpacka Rafts, a member of the Colorado Outdoor Business Alliance.

Many Colorado businesses depend upon water, in one way or another, although it’s not immediately clear how massive water storage projects like Gross Reservoir, Navajo Lake, Blue Mesa Reservoir, Lake Nighthorse, and the dozens of other multi-million-dollar reservoirs that grab water from our Colorado rivers have a direct benefit to the skiing or rafting industries.

This editorial series was inspired by a gift presented to me by a *Daily Post* reader, a book entitled, *Silver Fox of the Rockies: Delphus E. Carpenter and Western Water Compacts*, written by Daniel Tyler and published by the University of Oklahoma Press in

2003. Delph Carpenter's crusade, during the 1920s and 1930s, was to avoid litigation between the different states in the American West by forging river compacts — agreements that provided fair allocation of the West's relatively scarce water resources. In that crusade, he enjoyed considerable success, although the effort and stress eventually destroyed his health.

His crowning achievement was the approval of the seven-state Colorado River Compact in 1922, even if Arizona's state government didn't actually sign the Compact until 1944.

As stated previously, Carpenter grew up in a farming family near Greeley, Colorado, and his primary interest in water projects related to irrigated farming and ranching, but he watched the US Bureau

of Reclamation undergo massive changes during the first half of the 20th century, with an increased focus on hydroelectricity generation as the main source of revenue to fund the water projects. Building dams that had a large return in power generation permitted the federal government to deliver irrigation water for pennies on the dollar, since power sales were repaying the construction costs. (Paid, of course, over 50 years at ridiculously cheap interest rates.) Whether the projects were close to suitable farmland became a secondary concern.

The 45 major dams built along the Colorado River system.

Here in Archuleta County we have a few small reservoirs and other water projects that were *not* built

by the Bureau of Reclamation. Our reservoirs serve mainly urban and suburban areas in the community, while the more agriculturally-blessed parts of the county are crisscrossed by irrigation ditches that pull water from the San Juan and its various tributary creeks. We noted yesterday in Part Three, the US Geological Survey (USGS) published a report about 2015 water uses in Archuleta County (here) that suggests extensive irrigation within the county; slightly more than 94 percent of all the water used in Archuleta County is for irrigation. Residential and commercial uses amount to about 2,700 acre feet per year; irrigation accounts for about 47,000 acre feet. According to USGS.

Agriculture does not, however, provide 94

percent of the Gross Community Product — the community's overall production, services and sales. **According to the US Department of Agriculture,** the total net income from farming and ranching in Archuleta County in 2017 was -\$2.1 million. That's *negative* \$2.1 million, net income, from about \$11.2 million in sales. That's an average loss of \$5,291 per farm. 68 percent of our farms and ranches sold less than \$10,000 in products.

Agriculture uses 94 percent of the community's water. And our farmers and ranchers have to keep using it — even if they are losing money — if they want to hold on to their water rights, which are, in many cases, senior to the 1922 Colorado River Compact.

If our agricultural community in Pagosa were able to cut its water use by

3 percent, that would theoretically 'save' more water than if everyone else — homeowners and businesses — cut their water use by half.

Our historical traditions, out here in the high desert, have demanded that farmers and ranchers are delivered as much water as government projects and cooperative ditch companies can provide.

Between the passage of the Reclamation Act in 1902 and the 1966 controversy surrounding the Bridge and Marble Gorge dams — which would have flooded portions of the Grand Canyon — the US Bureau of Reclamation managed to place dams and reservoirs at pretty much every feasible location along the Colorado River system.

Those tax-funded water projects were part of an overriding intention, by the

federal government, to increase the population of the American West.

Then came the Sierra Club.

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Bill Hudson

Bill Hudson founded the Pagosa Daily Post in 2004 in hopes of making a decent living writing about local politics. The hope remains...

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The other issue that Ingram discovered was that, because of the high cost of these new Colorado River projects, it would take literally decades for them to repay their construction costs using electricity sales and payments from irrigators and municipalities. So, by the time the projects were creating revenue that might be used to finance the Pacific Southwest Water Plan — to augment the

Colorado River with water from the Columbia River, a thousand miles away — the Colorado River would probably be drained dry.

In some ways, the battle to defeat the Grand Canyon dams marked the 'coming of age' for America's environmental movement. With the help of two prominent California advertising gurus, the Sierra Club took out full-page ads in the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. One of the ads in 1966 asked readers — rhetorically, of course — if we ought to flood the Sistine Chapel to allow tourist to get closer to Michelangelo's paintings.

SHOULD WE ALSO FLOOD THE SISTINE CHAPEL SO TOURISTS CAN GET NEARER THE CEILING?

EARTH began four billion years ago and Man two million. The Age of Technology, on the other hand, is hardly a hundred years old, and on our time chart we have been generous to give it even the little line we have.

It seems to us hasty, therefore, during this blip of time, for Man to think of directing his fascinating new tools toward altering irrevocably the forces which made him. Nonetheless, in these few brief years among four billion, wilderness has all but disappeared. And now these:

1) There are proposals *still* before Congress to "improve" Grand Canyon. If they succeed, two dams could back up artificial lakes into 93 miles of canyon gorge. This would benefit tourists in power boats, it is argued, who would enjoy viewing the canyon wall more closely. (See headline.) Submerged underneath the tourists would be part of the most revealing single page of earth's history. The lakes would be as



5) In San Francisco, real estate interests have for years been filling a bay that made the city famous, putting tract houses over the fill; and now there's a new idea — still more fill, enough for an air cargo terminal as big as Manhattan.

There exists today a mentality which can conceive such destruction, giving commerce as ample reason. For 74 years, the Sierra Club (now with 48,000 members) has opposed that mentality. But now, when even Grand Canyon is endangered, we are at a critical moment in time.

This generation will decide if something untrammelled and free remains, as testimony we had love for those who follow.

We have been taking ads, therefore, asking people to write their Congressmen and Senators; Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall; The President; and to send us funds to continue the battle. Thousands have written, but meanwhile

Concludes the advertisement:

This generation will decide if something untrammelled and free remains, as testimony we had love for those

who follow.

We have been taking ads, therefore asking people to write their Congressmen and Senators; Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall; the President; and to send us funds to continue the battle. Thousands have written, but meanwhile, Grand Canyon legislation still stands a chance of passage. More letters are needed and much more money, to help fight the notion that Man no longer needs nature.

The ad included a form that could be cut out and enclosed when you mailed your money to the Sierra Club.

A generation did respond, as did the media. *Reader's Digest* — a publication not generally known for its progressive tone — attacked the proposed dams. So did *Life* magazine.

"Then we got plastered by *My Weekly Reader*," explained Reclamation staffer Dan Dreyfus, as quoted in Marc Reisner's remarkable 1986 book, *Cadillac Desert*. "You're in deep shit when you catch it from them. Mailbags were coming in by the hundreds, stuffed with letters from school kids..."

The Marble Canyon Dam officially died in 1968 when President Lyndon Johnson signed a law creating the Marble Canyon National Monument. Bridge Canyon remained on

the drawing board until its official demise in 1984.

What these Bureau of Reclamation defeats indicated was not only the overreach of the Bureau and the ungodly increase in the cost of dam construction and water projects in general, but also the growing influence of the environmental movement. America had been happy, for almost 200 years, to trample the natural environment — landscapes, plant and animal species, and especially free-flowing rivers — in the name of human settlement in places where settlement required us to plunder the environment for relatively short-term profit.

America, it seems, was slowly coming to its senses in 1966. But not quickly enough to stop the Central Arizona Project.

[Read Part Six...](#)

EDITORIAL: The Murder and Resurrection of the Colorado River, Part Six

[Bill Hudson](#)

[Read Part One](#)

We were sitting around the table at the San Juan Water Conservancy District Board meeting on October 15, discussing a request from Western Water Consultants (WWC) to help fund their cloud seeding efforts this coming winter. As far as I could tell from our conversation with WWC owners Eric and Mike Hjermsstad, there's no specific scientific data showing that cloud seeding in Archuleta County directly benefits the people of our community — or showing that it directly benefits anyone, for that matter — even though cloud seeding has been going on for decades.

Should Pagosa taxpayers continue funding an unproven project that — even if it actually works — might simply send additional water downstream to Arizona and California? That was the question facing our Board.

One Board member suggested that, assuming cloud seeding is effective here, there is at least additional water in the river. (For rafting and recreation, I suppose.)

"We're going to have more water in our streams, if you believe that cloud seeding works. And the estimates range from 2 percent to 15 percent more snow out of a particular storm."



I reminded the Board that these vague estimates are coming from the same people who are being paid to do the actual work.

Board member: "Bill, I have more faith in people, that they're not just in it for themselves. Is that possible, that they're in it for themselves? Yes, but I guess I'm not as much of a skeptic as you are..."

Anyone who has spent much time studying — with an open mind — the history of water development in the arid American West, comes to understand that the public has often been presented inaccurate data about the probable

costs and benefits of federal, state, and local water projects. Sometimes, the data has been outrageously inaccurate.

I experienced that kind of “outrageously inaccurate data” for the first time, when I was writing about the Dry Gulch Reservoir controversy, beginning in 2008. The same type of deception has been going on all across the American West since the early 1900s... if we are to believe the well-researched stories included in Marc Reisner’s 1987 book, *Cadillac Desert*.

Whether the people skewing and inflating water data were doing it “just for themselves” is not always clear. They may have believed the taxpayers would benefit anyway — even if the project ended up costing twice the original estimate or supplied a small percentage of the estimated water, or if the water was used in some manner other than what the taxpayers were promised.

Nevertheless, data has indeed been been “jerked around”, and certain politicians have been willing to swallow the inaccurate cost/benefit figures, especially if the water project happened to be serving their home district but was financed by all the nation’s taxpayers.

For example.

In 1922 the Colorado River Compact allocated 7.5 million acre feet of Colorado River water per year between California, Nevada and Arizona. Subsequent negotiations granted Arizona 2.8 million as their allotment. But the allotment was essentially worthless, because in order to use the water, Arizona would have to transport it from the western part of the state to the southern part. Even the spendthrifts at the Bureau of Reclamation called it a "mad man's dream."

From a 2012 analysis by Chris Edwards and Peter J. Hill, [*Cutting the Bureau of Reclamation and Reforming Water Markets:*](#)

By the 1960s, however, the situation had changed. For one thing, the Bureau of Reclamation was eager to find big new projects to keep the agency's large workforce employed. The Central Arizona Project (CAP) fit the bill since it would be hugely expensive to construct the needed pumps to lift water up great elevations and to deliver it more than 300 miles through aqueducts to Phoenix, Tucson, and surrounding areas. The bureau seized on the opportunity and "refused to believe any expert who told it what it didn't want to hear."



Central Arizona Project.

Dan Dreyfus was the Bureau of Reclamation official in charge of providing benefit-cost estimates at the time, and he later confessed: "I had to fly all the way out to Denver and jerk around the benefit-cost numbers to make the [CAP] look sound."

In 1968 after years of political infighting, Congress authorized the Central Arizona Project within a broader bill that included numerous other projects. The bill exemplified the power of congressional logrolling — new projects were spread across many different states and congressional districts. Dreyfus later said that some of projects in the bill were "pure trash," but stubborn members of Congress, defending their states, wanted them in the bill.

The Central Arizona Project was completed in 1993 at a

cost of about \$5 billion. Economists Steve Holland and Michael Moore completed a [detailed analysis of the benefits and costs](#) of CAP. They found that rather than providing net benefits to society, it resulted in imposing deadweight losses on society of more than \$1 billion. Like numerous prior Bureau of Reclamation projects, the CAP was a net waste of resources.

One huge problem with Reclamation projects is that the price of the water sold is highly subsidized by taxes. Farmers often pay a tiny percentage of what the water actually cost to produce. In 2003, for example, California's Imperial Water District offered to sell a portion of their Reclamation water to the City of San Diego for \$225 per acre-foot. The Imperial Water District was buying the water for \$15 an acre-foot.

Here in Archuleta County, where most of our water still flows like... well, like water... most agricultural users don't have to pay for water at all, except perhaps the cost of belonging to a ditch company. They simply divert it from local creeks and rivers, the same way many have done for the past century. As we noted earlier in this editorial series, agricultural water use appears to account for about 94 percent of the water use in Archuleta County.

"Use-it-or-lose-it" rules require agricultural users to make full use of their water allocations year after year, or risk

losing them in the future. These rules and others create disincentives for water conservation. If farmers and other end users risk losing their water rights if they don't consume their allocations, and if they can't profit from selling excess water, they have little incentive to use water efficiently.

As the water levels dropped in Lake Mead and Lake Powell and numerous other Reclamation reservoirs over the past 10 years, water experts came up with ideas about further draining the Colorado River.

But we — most of us — actually don't want our rivers drained, despite what our federal, state and local governments might believe.

Is there, instead, some way to resurrect our rivers that truly makes sense? I mean, more sense than Proposition DD? ... the ballot measure that asks us to ask gambling addicts to pay out millions of dollars in gambling taxes, to be spent on new Colorado water projects...?