

Stop stealing Sanpete water

February 6, 2013

Carbon County needs to take its clutches off Sanpete County water in the mountains above Fairview.

Since World War II ended, an inter-county battle has continued unabated, even though there is really no legal dispute over who actually owns the water.

Sanpete County does.

At issue is Sanpete County's effort to build a small reservoir a couple miles east of the head of Fairview Canyon. Known as the Narrows Project, it would provide reliable water to northern Sanpete County, which runs pretty much dry every year after the snow melts.

To understand the dispute, one must look back at pre-war history and the wartime expansion of Scofield Reservoir high above Carbon County. Scofield is the primary water resource for Carbon, but for decades water owned by Sanpete County has been helping to fill it, flowing northeast to Scofield instead of to Sanpete farms to the west.

Never mind that the U.S. Interior Department has long recognized that both counties need water storage; Carbon has hogged it all, even though Sanpete has had virtually no storage of its own.

The need was seen as far back as the 1930s, but during World War II it was discovered that the Scofield Dam was failing. If that happened, critical rail lines moving coal to the US Steel plant in Vineyard would be wiped out, compromising the war effort as well as Carbon County's coal economy.

And so a truce was struck between the counties to put the Sanpete storage project on hold. Sanpete agreed that Scofield should be repaired and expanded first. Its own water storage needs could wait. In exchange, Carbon County agreed to support Sanpete's effort after the war.

To that end, on Oct. 11, 1943, a written agreement was executed laying out that program. Scofield was then repaired, and it doubled in size.

Yet, as the years progressed, Carbon County became increasingly more possessive. It has locked elbows with environmentalists and thrown up roadblock after roadblock for a modest reservoir that would send water to Sanpete County instead of to Carbon via Scofield Reservoir.

This is an egregious act of bad faith that must be corrected.

If the project goes through, a supplemental water supply would be provided for irrigated lands and municipal and industrial water users in northern Sanpete County, where agricultural income

would be increased by 11 percent, according to the Bureau, because it would allow such things as a third crop of hay per season instead of only two crops.

A dam and reservoir would be constructed on Gooseberry Creek. Water would be diverted through an existing tunnel and a proposed pipeline to Cottonwood Creek. Recreation facilities would be developed, and a 2,500-acre-foot minimum pool for fish habitat would be provided.

The resulting water storage and delivery system would be a non-Federal project owned and operated by the Sanpete water district.

Carbon says the Narrows Project will deprive it of water it needs. This is disingenuous at best. Studies by the Utah State Engineer's office and private engineering firms show Carbon will experience a reduction of only about 700 acre-feet of water per year. Note that Scofield, Carbon's primary water storage, holds 73,600 acre feet.

We think Carbon County can afford to share today; it agreed to share at least 60 years ago. It needs to get behind this project.

The environmentalists are a problem of their own, but their issues are equally resolvable. Mitigation measures would be required to offset any adverse impacts. Additional conservation measures would be required. To be eligible to receive water from the Narrows Project, water users would be required to implement conservation measures.

The feds, including Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers, need to get off the dime. The farms and communities of Sanpete County have waited long enough.

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