



Don't Go Near Our Water

By Monroe S. Miller

I'll never forget two bumper stickers I saw while attending the GCSSA Conference in San Antonio, Texas in 1978. That was a time when the energy crisis was occupying our minds, especially the minds of those of us living and working in the north. The grim message of those bumper stickers read: "Let the bastards freeze to death in the dark" and "Drive 95 and freeze a Yankee". There was no comfort in those words and they put on display the attitude of some in the energy rich southwest and west. We are, in short, terribly vulnerable when it comes to energy resources.

But now the shoe is on the other foot. What we lack in the northcentral, central and northeast states in terms of energy resources (oil, gas and coal) we may nearly make up for in water. Water just might, in the years to come, be our greatest asset. And when speaking of water, it goes without saying that we must speak of Great Lakes water.

The Great Lakes are at risk because of the prospect of bone-dry irrigation ditches and parched Sun Belt golf courses. Although not yet at the crisis stage, the Ogallala aquifer under the High Plains states has dropped 10 to 200 feet and is going down more each year. When the Central Arizona Project, which diverts water from the Colorado River, reaches its final destination in Tuscon, it will supply only $\frac{2}{3}$ of the water needed in its service area by the year 2000. By the way, this little water project cost \$3.5 billion of your tax dollars. In the lower Colorado River Basin and in some areas in the southern plains, groundwater withdrawals exceed recharge, resulting in permanent lowering of the water table. This doesn't strike me as being very intelligent water policy. And the cost of water to users in these areas is finally starting to rise, which they do not like any more than we liked the cost of their oil ten or so years ago. Obviously, the pressure for even more water is building. And they are looking in our direction.

You could call theories being put forth the Great Lakes Water Bail-out. The thirsty states look north and see 95% of the fresh surface water in America. "The technology to move water from those lakes through pipelines or canals exists, so why not quench our thirst with their water?", the theory goes. In 1985, a California congressman proposed (unsuccessfully) that federal agencies be authorized to start Great Lakes Diversion in the national interest. The GRAND Canal Concept, which would turn James Bay into a fresh water impoundment and distribute water through the Great Lakes system to the arid states for the meager sum of \$79 billion of the taxpayers' money, enjoys support in the dry regions. There will be more and more outrageous proposals like these that we'll have to ward off in the near future.

Why be so concerned, since the Great Lakes have so much water? Here are a few economic facts about the Great Lakes and how important they are to Wisconsin and other bordering states:

- (1) One-fifth of the manufacturing in the U.S. is located along the Great Lakes shores. They are there because of the need for large quantities of clean water. Specific to Wisconsin is the fact that for thirty years we have been the number one paper making state. That standing would not have been possible nor will it be without an adequate supply of water.
- (2) There were 23.7 billion kilowatt hours of hydro-electric power generated in 1983 by water flowing through the Great Lakes. Additionally, utilities with plants along the lakes use the lake water in steam condensers and for boiler water. The lakes are also used to transport coal to electricity generating plants.
- (3) There are 26 million people living in the Great Lakes Region who rely on the lakes for their drinking water.

- (4) In 1983, 78.6 million tons of commercial cargo were shipped through Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. The St. Lawrence Seaway had 49.7 million tons of cargo go through its locks the same year.
- (5) Water-based recreation and tourism, both big business in Wisconsin, generate between \$8 billion and \$12 billion in the Great Lakes Region.
- (6) There are 98 state parks and 12 national parks on the Great Lakes shores. Canada has another 39 provincial parks.
- (7) The Great Lakes are the source of fish caught and sold by commercial fishermen in the area.

These facts illustrate pretty clearly how important the Great Lakes are to us, our economy and our lifestyles. In the future, water in general and the Great Lakes in particular will be even more important in our region. They are a tremendous asset that can help lead us back economically and play a critical part in future growth. We must protect them.

They do contain enormous amounts of water. But remember this: only one percent (1%) is renewable. Consume or divert more than that small fraction and the level of the lakes will be lowered forever. That is unacceptable. The University of Wisconsin-Madison Sea Grant Institute did some modelling to see the impact diversion would have on a couple of industries - shipping and hydropower. Lowering the level of the Great Lakes would reduce the size of ships that can use its harbors. Loads of cargo would have to be smaller, and more ships put to use. The result would be the loss of competitiveness. Diversion would lower flow of water in the lakes and reduce the amount of electricity generated by hydropower plants. This power would have to be replaced through purchases of energy on the open market - a direct economic cost. This hydropower is energy lost to an area that has few energy resources. The whole scenario doesn't make any sense. The Sea Grant Institute estimated that losses to just these two industries would be in the hundreds of millions a year. And Golf Course Superintendents in Wisconsin and bordering states can tell you of years of drought, when those Great Lakes may be very important to us in very personal ways.

Any decline in the economy of the GLR directly impacts on golf courses.

Fewer people, less golf. Less prosperous society, less prosperous golf courses. We need the tourism of the lakes to help support our daily fee golf courses. DIVERSION OF GREAT LAKES WATER WOULD BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE WISCONSIN GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY. We must recognize this and assume proper leadership roles in protecting the lakes.

What are some solutions? The first could easily be a sensible federal water policy. You will not believe this: Albuquerque was paying 59¢ per 1000 gallons of water and Dallas was paying 80¢ per 1000 gallons of water at the same time Milwaukee was paying \$1.40 per 1000 gallons of water that was drawn directly from Lake Michigan! This is total insanity and obviously has to end. If we eliminate these mammoth federal subsidies for cheap water, the growth of dry areas will be determined by economics. Here are some more figures of equal illogic: studies of western irrigation projects show that users of water paid only 27¢ to \$9.32 per acre-foot of water that cost the government between \$54 and \$130 to deliver! And the water is used to produce agricultural crops that have enormous surpluses! This is ridiculous. A federal water policy would require users - domestic, industrial, agricultural and yes, even golf courses, to pay what the water cost to supply. This is a first major step.

It seems to me that strong support

for the USGA research program working to develop more drought tolerant grasses deserves widespread and more generous support, especially from regions desperate for water. I looked at the list of individuals, clubs and associations donating to the program last year. It is an unimpressive list, considering the potential seriousness of the problem. It also seems logical to continue development of the use of effluent water for golf course irrigation - I've not read a whole lot about it lately. Maybe that idea needs to be moved to the forefront again.

More serious water conservation programs could be developed and implemented; there is currently widespread wasteful and unnecessary irrigation. I think a persuasive argument could be made for increasing the efficiency of irrigation equipment. The technology may or may not exist, but when the price is right the equipment will be on the market. And we might have to accept some new and radical changes in golf course design in arid regions. Golf course management expectations may have to change; like it or not, it just may not be possible to irrigate a 150 acre 18 hole golf course in the arid region from fence line to fence line, unless players are willing to pay for it. And let's face it: limited water availability may dictate land use, land development and new construction.

I would also ask those looking our way for a solution to their water prob-

lem to realize that the solution should not, must not and will not come at our expense. I would expect the few suggestions I thought of (and there are scores of others, I'm sure, from those vastly smarter than I) to appeal to the conservationist in all of us. Further, preserving and protecting the Great Lakes and the welfare of the region should speak to the conscience in all of us. There are other answers to the water shortages in the south and west.

There is a broader, more general point to be made in this discussion. One who studies New England like I do can find wisdom from any one of her many and famous philosophers. Henry David Thoreau, the sage of Concord, Massachusetts, once observed that "This curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient; more beautiful than useful; it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used." E.B. White remarked some thirty years ago, "If Thoreau were here today he would see that 10,000 engineers are busy making sure that the world shall be convenient even if it is destroyed in the process, and others are determined to increase its usefulness even though its beauty is lost somewhere along the way."

Both of these men could have been talking of our Great Lakes. The Lakes are worth whatever efforts are required to save and preserve them, for our children and for their children. It is the right thing to do.

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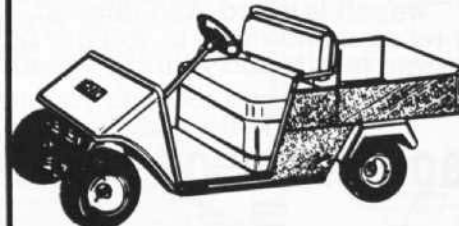


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