

EDITORIAL

By Bill Swichtenberg



The Ghost of Tom Joad

Conjuring up images of the Dust Bowl, this year has been extremely dry in the United States. According to the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska, 26 states are in drought conditions. Droughts are ranked exceptional (the highest ranking) in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico.

In a typical year, drought hits 10 to 12 percent of the country. This year, crops are withering in heat-baked fields and ranchers have sold off herds rather than let them starve for lack of pasture.

A key factor in the water shortage is the lack of adequate snowpack in the mountains. Melting snow from higher elevations usually feeds rivers and streams, but this year snowpacks from the Rocky Mountains were only one-quarter of their normal levels. Of course, lack of rain is another factor. In Dodge City, Kansas, rainfall over the 14 months ending in July amounted to the driest period since 1952-1953.

In Colorado, Denver's water resources, serving 1.1 million customers, reached an all-time low in July. Its reservoirs registered 63 percent full compared to 80 percent during the same period a year ago. In Aurora, Colorado, reservoirs are at 48 percent of normal compared with 81 percent of last July.

Cities all over the United States are taking various approaches to the drought and resulting water crisis. Denver suburbs have implemented tough new water restrictions. These restrictions are the first in 21 years.

The City of Denver also has put together humorous water conservation ads. These ads have told residents to

"Only Wash the Stinky Parts" and "Instead of Washing Clothes, Don't Wear Any."

However, for those not complying, it is no laughing matter. Known as the "Sod Squad" in Denver, water police have given out 1,254 violation notices in July, the first month of mandatory water restrictions. The fines are \$100 after the first warning and \$500 if you still don't take heed.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California has started a multi-faceted campaign to encourage outdoor water conservation and promote the use of native and drought-tolerant plants in gardens, with the help of actress Rene Russo. The district's new campaign will include print advertisements, public service announcements, cable television commercials as well as movie theater slides throughout the district's six-county service area. The campaign shifts the focus from conservation inside the home to outside, where 30 to 70 percent of water is used.

Metropolitan does not see this campaign as a quick fix. They are hoping to take water conservation to the next level - into people's homes and lifestyles.

However, it does seem as if some water programs are working. Denver's water consumption is down to 350 million gallons on a hot summer day from 450 million gallons before the restrictions began. The hope now is for a wet winter to recharge the water supply.

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