

Published: 04.23.2006

My opinion George F. Will: Arizona's farsighted Hayden: CAP hero

My opinion George F. Will

PHOENIX

Water is an odd natural resource. It falls unbidden from the sky and gathers without human help underground. It flows through many jurisdictions, giving rise to the old Western axiom that whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over. Time was, the fighting was done with Winchesters and Colts. Then Westerners became tame and turned to combat by dueling legislators, including those who produced the Central Arizona Project. The CAP's current general manager is David S. "Sid" Wilson Jr., who has three modern axioms:

- Water flows to money.
- It costs more to cause water to flow uphill than downhill.
- Water doesn't go anywhere without plumbing.

The CAP is the plumbing that brings Colorado River water to this semiarid and booming metropolitan area. (Tucson Water delivers a blend — a half-and-half mix of groundwater and Central Arizona Project water from the Colorado River — to many Tucson-area neighborhoods.) Most of the 3.7 million who live in Phoenix — the area's population grows 2,300 a week — have no idea how indebted they are to someone they have never heard of.

Carl Hayden, a former sheriff in the Arizona territory, died 34 years ago after a record 57 consecutive years in Congress. Today, in an 11-year drought in the Southwest that may be the worst in 500 years but that has left this city remarkably untroubled, let us now praise Hayden (1877-1972) as a creator of the CAP, government at its farsighted best.

Early in the 20th century, the seven states — California, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Wyoming, Colorado — that share the Colorado River Basin were wrangling over water. The most populous, California, thought it could outvote the others in Congress. Then California's attention was called to the Constitution's Article One, Section Three, the part that created the Senate, where all states are created equal. Hayden read that part.

He entered the House of Representatives five days after Arizona achieved statehood in 1912. Midway through his eight terms there, in 1921, Congress authorized the seven states to enter into a compact to divvy up the Colorado River. In 1922 the states submitted a compact to Congress. For 22 years their legislators argued about details. In 1928, Hayden, then a freshman senator who would come to be called the "Silent Senator," spoke for nine hours against details of a proposal to build on the Colorado River what would become the Hoover Dam. Twenty-three years were to pass before his next major speech on the Senate floor, but he kept busy.

In 1944, Arizona became the last of the seven states to ratify the compact. Twenty-four years later, in September 1968, President Lyndon Johnson declared Carl Hayden Day at the White House when he signed the law authorizing expenditures for, among other Colorado basin projects, the CAP aqueduct system. The 336-mile-long system now brings water all the way to Tucson, which Wilson says used to be the world's largest city entirely dependent on groundwater.

Phoenix recently went 143 days without rain, breaking the previous record of 101, set in 2000. Even cacti were

wilting. But Phoenix was not, thanks to Hayden's handiwork, which soon may be supplemented by some bugs.

Tamarisks, also known as salt cedars, are especially thirsty trees that slurp as much as 500,000 acre-feet (about 163 billion gallons) a year from the Colorado — almost twice Nevada's allocation. The state of Colorado has experimented with releasing 60,000 beetles that eat only salt cedar leaves and are salt cedars' only predators.

CAP's Wilson says future management techniques may include transporting water from other regions and desalinization. Groundwater can be recharged by pouring river water into porous soil, through which the water trickles to aquifers. Also, there is cloud seeding, which he says does not increase aggregate rainfall unless conditions are ripe for rain. There are concerns it can cause "rain here, now, rather than there, then." Wilson wants it here, now: "There is so much moisture in our sky that a 10 percent increase here doesn't create a loss there."

The economic incentives for imaginative thinking are huge. For example, developers are required to demonstrate the existence of water supplies for their projects *for 100 years*. But managing water is the region's oldest tradition: the Hohokam Indians diverted water for irrigation 1,700 years ago.

Ever since World War II brought many thousands of military people to Arizona to train — people who liked it and returned to live — and ever since the invention of air conditioning, the sort of people who always underestimate American ingenuity have been predicting that water shortages will soon stop Arizona's growth. Such people do not appreciate the continuing fecundity of the former sheriff's congressional career that ended Jan. 3, 1969.

George Will's e-mail address is georgewill@washpost.com.

All content copyright © 1999-2006 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.