

Fund vital to protecting important resource

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The Truckee River watershed needs a multi-disciplinary strategy that encompasses watershed planning, watershed restoration, stormwater management, watershed research, better development design, along with public education, outreach and training.

Assemblywoman Heidi Gansert's recent attack on the Truckee River Fund and the Reno Gazette-Journal's presentation of her arguments, and uninformed taxpayer concerns, lack the acknowledgement of a basic logic: that we as a community need to invest in strategies and programs that protect our drinking-water supplies.

The Truckee River Fund is one of very few sources of revenue with which we can pursue these protection efforts. The Truckee Meadows Water Authority is a logical agency to spearhead these efforts. After all, 85 percent of TMWA's product comes from the Truckee River and its watershed, and the water we pump from the ground is inexorably linked to the watershed and how we treat it.

Tax or user fee, the 50 cents a month is not only a "protect me now" policy, but also will help us maintain the balance between more users and pressures as the community grows into the future. For instance, Chalk Creek in Northwest Reno has become a major polluter of the Truckee River because stormwater and yard over-irrigation go into storm drains and then directly to the river. Chalk Creek is filled with road runoff, fertilizer, pesticides and whatever else people send down the gutter.

Also looming on the horizon is growth in Truckee, Calif. We have superb water quality now, but most of our water comes from the eastern Sierra Nevada, where there are huge development pressures that can only degrade our future drinking-water quality.

The Truckee River Fund can help fix some of these urgent problems.

Not only does six bucks a year help us with drinking-water protection, but the programs also are addressing sanitary sewer and downriver water issues — each with the potential to put a screeching halt to the Truckee Meadows' active economy. If this is a charity, then we — and our children's children — are all beneficiaries.

The Truckee River Fund is a very public process with numerous layers of review and outreach. Projects are reviewed no fewer than three times before they are funded. All processes are public. The problem with the Truckee River Fund is that it's too little, and before it's too late, we may find that we have put our most important natural resource in peril.

With more than 75 agencies claiming some piece of watershed management, what better place than TMWA to protect the watershed that supplies our drinking water?

Maybe the question Assemblywoman Gansert should be asking is how the Legislature can assist with our responsibility of protecting the most vital community resource in the nation's driest state, and to do it with a generational funding mechanism with full oversight from the public and the community.

A wiser man once said: The price of constructive criticism is a viable alternative. To attack the Truckee River Fund is the wrong battle to "reform" TMWA. The Truckee River Fund may be an irreversible casualty of a political war that our river, our drinking water, can ill afford.

If there is any call to action in this battle, it is that our community should be even more diligent in watershed protection.

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