

An opinion - Park County Land & Water Trust Fund

By Leona Nelson Special to The Flume | Posted: Thursday, October 18, 2018 1:57 pm

In Park County, we pride ourselves on being self-reliant. Here in Shawnee, our forefathers dug the Price Ditch in 1890, diverting water from Starvation Gulch.

This remains an important source of water to the community to this day, filling the Shawnee Water Supply Reservoir.

In 1929, our community formed the non-profit Shawnee Water Consumers Association to provide water to our residents and businesses. We are proud of our long history of managing our own water.

Even so, we need help. In recent years, the State of Colorado threatened to shut down Shawnee's water supply for non-compliance with new regulations about water usage and water releases.

The water association is run by volunteers, and the work is considerable. Beyond the effort of physical maintenance of the ditch and reservoir, our record keeping systems were outdated, and we did not have the funds for new engineering, equipment and technology to keep up with the state's changing requirements.

If the state had shut down Shawnee's water supply, we would have had to haul water to our homes – impacting our property values, adding expenses and degrading our quality of life.

The Park County Land and Water Trust Fund helped save the day, providing a grant to fund engineering work, water usage technology, new flumes and equipment to provide access to these areas. We could not have done this work without the LWTF.

This has happened to other rural communities in Park County as well. Guffey Fire Protection District, Fairplay Beach owned by the Town of Fairplay, Park County and Upper South Platte Water Conservancy District, Indian Mountain Metro District and others have all faced losing their rights to water per new state regulations. Without water, we cannot live here.

The Park County LWTF is dedicated to the protection of water resources in our communities. This takes many forms: augmentation water, stream restoration, water quality studies, preservation of wetlands and ranches' irrigation water, identifying mining impacts to streams and more.

There is no doubt that water is our most precious resource, and that is true for people and wildlife alike. Any project that protects, preserves, maintains and enhances water resources and water rights in Park County can use these funds – it is not limited to governments. A non-profit like the Shawnee Water Consumers Association is eligible, and we, the private citizens who depend on these water resources, benefit.

Which other communities in Park County will need this assistance next? It could be you and your neighbors.

The 1 percent sales tax that funds the LWTF is on the ballot for renewal this November. This has been in place for 20 years, but it is as important now as ever.

Colorado is growing fast, and demand for water is only increasing. For all who value our rural home, please remember the importance of this sales tax when you vote.

For more information: www.friendsofparkcountylandandwatertrust.org.