

According to the July 13 Gazette, “City must cut 200 downtown trees”, we will soon lose the trees on many of our most beautiful parkways to drought stress and to disease brought on by this stress. These hundred year old trees planted by Gen. Palmer and the city founders are part of the natural capital and the heritage of Colorado Springs.

“Tree infrastructure” of this age cannot be replaced in our lifetime and yet our city leaders have treated this asset very casually. I was told of the under watering of these trees last year by a senior member of our city forestry department who predicted their demise. But city policies required the department to withhold needed water from these historic trees so that there would be enough water to allow new sod lawns of water guzzling bluegrass to be planted in the dog days of summer.

Given what we now know about the frequency of drought and the high cost to the ratepayer of developing new water supplies, why our development plans allow any new homes to have 100% bluegrass is a mystery to me. A modest water conservation policy would at least require new lawns to be established in spring or fall when less intensive watering is required. Yet last year our city council moved in the opposite direction – allowing new lawns to be planted in July – at the same time that the trees in our parks and medians were being denied the water they needed.

For those who care about quality of life in Colorado Springs and what makes it a special place this inability of city council to face our water issues is a very sad state of affairs. There are a whole range of options for conserving water by planning for growth in more intelligent ways (some of which are outlined on the Center for Colorado Policy Studies website at [web.uccs.edu/ccps](http://web.uccs.edu/ccps)). We need to face up to the fact that we live in a semi-desert with periodic cycles of serious drought as we plan for our future.

To those who say we need to develop the water rights we own or more water storage, I ask “At what price?” We are already slated to pay 50% more for water over the next five years so that Colorado Springs Utilities can develop new sources and storage to accommodate more population growth. I count the loss of our hundred year old trees – private and public -- as another important part of the price we are paying. Perhaps their demise is our canary in the coal mine, whose death warned of dangers to come for humans if something wasn’t changed.

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