‘Net zero water’ is the next extreme environmental cause

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By Randy W. Bright

Most of us have heard of the movement to eliminate carbon as a source of energy, but now environmentalists are taking aim at water with a new set of principles: Net Zero Water.

According to a *Planetizen* article, Net Zero Water, means “using only as much water as falls on your site and eliminating all water quality impacts from the site.”

“Building off the principles of net zero energy and climate neutrality, Net Zero Water (NZW) is (a) concept that aims to change the way water resources are managed by making water resource planning decisions based on local conditions. Rather than going out and securing water supplies to meet historical demand patterns, a net zero water approach looks at local precipitation patterns and tries to maintain consumption at or below that available supply. And, rather than allowing water quality impacts from stormwater runoff in developed areas to flow downstream, a net zero water approach looks to treat runoff on-site.”

According to the EPA, Americans use an average of 300 gallons of water per day, most of which is for toilet flushing, showers, faucets and washing clothes. That is an annual usage of nearly 110,000 gallons.

Like many environmental ideas, ideas may sound good at the surface, but practicality has an odd habit of getting in the way. There may have been days when 300 gallons of water fell on my property, but certainly not every day. Even on the days when we did have torrential rainfall, I doubt it amounted to enough to meet that kind of demand on a consistent basis. And if I had a container to store just 10 percent of that demand, it would take a container that was 25x110x4 feet deep.

Clearly there are problems with this idea, but even if we could devise a way to harvest and recycle enough water for normal daily use, there are other problems to consider.

In some states in America (Utah, Washington and Colorado), it is illegal to harvest water from your own property because the government takes the position that that water doesn’t belong to you.

Some years ago, an acquaintance who owned property in Colorado was ordered by the state to immediately destroy the beaver dams on his property. It seems that the dams were holding water that the state said didn’t belong to him, preventing other people who also didn’t own it from using it. He sued the state, claiming that the state was violating his property rights and he eventually won.

Several years ago, the Oklahoma legislature passed the “Water for 2060 Act.” It stated, “The Legislature hereby declares that, in order to protect Oklahoma citizens from increased water supply shortages and groundwater depletions by the year 2060 in most of the eighty-two

watershed planning basins in the state as described in the 2012 Update of the Oklahoma Comprehensive Water Plan, the public policy of this state is to establish and work toward a goal of consuming no more fresh water in the year 2060 than is consumed statewide in the year 2012, while continuing to grow population and economy of the state and to achieve this goal through utilizing existing water supplies more efficiently and expanding the use of alternatives such as wastewater, brackish water and other nonpotable supplies. Provided, however, that nothing in the Water for 2060 Act shall be construed as amending the provisions of law pertaining to rights or permits to use water."

When that law was passed, did any of our legislators think about how exactly this was going to be accomplished, or that in effect it would tell industries, don't come here, we don't have enough water for you?

And how about densely developed urban areas? California is entitled to 4.4 million acre-feet of water each year from the Colorado River. Yet California allows much of its own surface water to flow out to the Pacific Ocean.

In addition, hundreds of dams across America have been purposely removed to benefit the ecosystem, reducing supplies of fresh water and effectively blocking the opportunity for creating noncarbon power, hydroelectricity.

Well, environmentalism has never been known for consistency.

There is enough water for everyone and there is certainly nothing wrong with anyone who has enough rainfall to harvest water for their needs. But let's not let an idea intentioned for good become the same behemoth that the federal government has made out of, for example, carbon. Like carbon, water has too much potential for power over our lives.

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