Scarcity of Opportunity and Abundance of Need by Kevin Pilgrim

We have a problem in this Country and in Colorado. We have many problems in this Country that are all interconnected as all things in the Colorado River Basin are connected and decisions, or a lack of decisions, affect other watersheds, States and the Federal Government. Many others eloquently describe the interconnectedness of economics with climate change with civil unrest with food and water insecurity. I am going to focus on what is near and dear to my heart, rivers.

Streams, creeks, arroyos, channels, big ditches (I do not like this whitewater euphemism for the Grand Canyon because it is Grand), canals, all names for pathways of water. Water flows no matter what. Gravity works. Try as we might to hold up the sky and the earth and the water, we cannot. We cannot argue with physics as I often say and now post online. It is hard to argue with physics because physics does not argue back, it just is.

Rivers are an expression of their watershed. It seems simple enough. I said this in a job interview once and the person conducting the interview who would be my supervisor for a river restoration position turned around and looked at her college for verification. He nodded yes. What we put into the watershed comes out. We have a term for it now. We live in the Anthropocene where there are microplastics everywhere and we are leaving a mark on the surface of the earth for future geologists to discover (Malhi, 2017). Every surface of the earth and the ocean and under the ocean has been altered by humans. Everything. We even shifted so much water around on the surface of the earth we altered the rotation of the earth (Valencic et. al., 2025). The location of stored water moved enough mass so the momentum, earth's rotation, shifts. That is how much effect we have on the earth. We truly live in the Anthropocene. We altered the rotation of the earth.

We have an abundance of need to restore our watersheds. Climate change driven by burning fossil fuels has altered the hydrologic cycle and the fire regime we live in. Wildfires are altering the watersheds so the pathways of water are altered. The water is moving more sediment and we are seeing what we only imagined in the scientific literature before by piecing together geologic records. We suppressed forest fires as we try to suppress all things we fear. In doing so, we make the problem worse.

We have an abundance of need. We know we need to correct the alterations to our watersheds. We know we need to change the way we build our Cities. We know we need to change our ways before the collapse of our fragile Democracy. We have seen the dark forces try to tear apart every check and balance on Power and we still have some few remaining. The recent election is hopeful but we still need to change our systems and change our thinking.

We have a scarcity of opportunity. We do not fund our science, our agencies, our research, our maintenance (this is really important), our learners and we need to. We need to fund science, educators, practitioners, first responders, wildland fire people (I do not think we should call them fire fighters anymore), observers, communicators, therapists (yes mental health investment is needed), ecologists, geomorphologists, hydrologists, and all the other positions that I haven't thought of. This scarcity has a negative effect on people, on collaborative efforts, on relationships, and I have experienced this first hand.

This will change. I believe Winston Churchill "You can always count on the Americans to do the right thing, after they have exhausted all the other possibilities." That is because we are so reluctant to raise taxes and fund things that are not seen as business friendly. I say, who defines which businesses benefit? I hope my business benefits. I hope your business benefits. I hope relationships are repaired. I hope people start to see that collaboration and creativity are the way we will face the problems we face today and find solutions. We need to focus on and fund solutions.

The need has never greater. The scarcity is clear. I know things will change. Until they do, be kind to each other and remember we are facing struggles we never show to the world. Give grace when the opportunity arises.

References

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Winston Churchill Quote - https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/730485-you-can-always-count-on-the-americans-to-do-the