

DU Students Are Ignoring the Denver Basin Aquifer

By Callie Miller

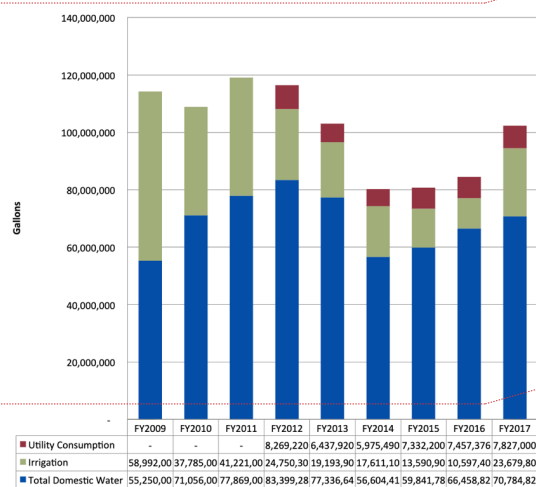
During the last few weeks' crazy snowstorms verging on blizzards, Colorado was in a stupor of shoveling every hour and driving about 5 miles per hour just to get around the block. For the few days that we got to lounge in the abnormally hot sunshine, we heard our gutters and drainpipes working to move all that precipitation from our roofs, glad to know that our dry, desert-state was getting the water it needed, right?

Well, actually no. Our state, or more closely to home, our great city of Denver, is—and has been—running out of water.

After seeing DU's newest [2019 Sustainability Report](#), I feel great about what our school is doing to prolong our time here on mother earth—if not save her—but one thing stood out that I didn't understand: where's the information about our water usage?

In 2018 our Sustainability Report showed incredible improvement in our irrigation water usage, but what was truly concerning is [our domestic water usage](#). Domestic water use is exactly what it sounds like: all "household" ways in which we use our water here at DU like for drinking, washing our clothes and dishes, brushing our teeth, showering, flushing our toilets, making food, and similar actions. According to DU's 2018 Sustainability Report, 69% of the water we used was domestic and it didn't look to be getting any better!

Total Water Use



Commented [CM1]: This title needed to feel like something I would see as some news header, so I tried to think back on recent articles I had read. I noticed it needed to be alarming enough to draw readers in but also informative on who it's for and what it's about.

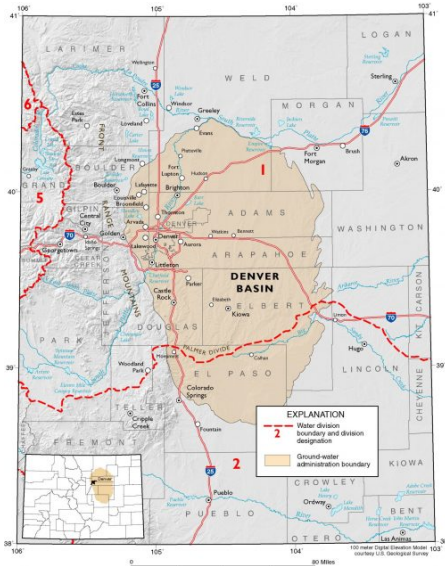
Commented [CM2]: There needed to be a reason people would feel connected to this op-ed, and everyone in Colorado was hit really hard with snow the weekend before I wrote this.

Commented [CM3]: There needed to be stylistic inputs and the wordcount for this op-ed was very low. So I dug into my own poetic experience to convey points quickly and concisely. This short paragraph was styled after more conversational style.

Commented [CM4]: These sustainability reports and the following bar graph are what inspired this op-ed. Adding it in near the beginning was in the hopes that readers would see this information to be as infuriating and inspiring like I had.

Commented [CM5]: I previously was not going to include a definition of "domestic water usage" but after noticing that in class discussions about this very topic people weren't sure what was all included in this umbrella term, I linked the DU water usage for reference and explained what is meant by this, so discussion came in handy.

We're Colorado, we get so much mountain runoff, so why not use it, right? Trust me, I was in the same boat to think this, but our water consumption isn't just from our beautiful mountains, it's also from where we cannot see at all—underground. The Denver Basin Aquifer,



one among many, is right below our feet and drying up by the second. According to [The Denver Post](#), our water wells from the Denver Basin fall 30 feet and we use 38,742 acre-feet of them a year. The mountain runoff and precipitation surely help 'recharge' the aquifer, but not as fast as we're taking the water out.

Coloradans have known of the depleting aquifers and [drought](#) for a long time now, but we've stopped hearing about it. It's time to bring it back into conversation.

Colorado has [seven principle aquifers](#) which include the well-known Ogallala Aquifer in the Northeasters Plains, but according to many sources like The Denver Post and Environmental Geology, [Ogallala](#) and other aquifers are in an equal if not worse position than our own Denver Basin.

Normally, agriculture and irrigation are the main issues for aquifers running dry, but this is Denver, this is DU, we need to cut back in other ways. CGS (the Colorado Geological Survey) tells us that the Denver Basin Aquifer is greatly used for domestic purposes, and if DU is using such an important water source, shouldn't we be wary of how much we're using?

Yes, college is most of our first times living away from home, and with so much freedom we might not know how much water use is too much water use. I get it. I, too, enjoy a twenty-minute shower and I would love to clean off every night before bed, but we all need to make sacrifices.

"I forgot to pay attention to how long the water is running" is unacceptable. "My clothes get dirty after just one wear" is just a bold-face lie. How many more times are we going to hear excuses—or even worse use them ourselves—before it's too late to recharge our aquifer fully?

Commented [CM6]: I was told in a peer review that I needed to feel more inclusive about my audience and that I needed to become more specific, so I added some continued commentary about living in Colorado.

Commented [CM7]: Some back-up was needed, I knew that simply saying DU needed us to act on this wouldn't be as motivating as saying the city of Denver and entire state of Colorado needed us. Since even The Denver Post was raving about it I felt I had some leverage.

Commented [CM8]: In conversation with peers, I found that people wanted to know a little more as to why I cared about the aquifers. It came to my attention that people don't really think (or know) about the drought here in Colorado due to a lack of information and attention to it. I made sure to give plenty of information with a link, rather than using up more of the word count with explanations.

Commented [CM9]: This is the first aquifer issue I ever learned about back in my first year of high school. Bringing this up brought back a lot of what we spoke about then and it reminded me about how absurd it is that I didn't even know of our drought and that out aquifers are drying up until I was fourteen years old.

Commented [CM10]: I feel really guilty when I find that I've used up a lot of water even though I know we are in a lot of trouble already. I felt I had to be honest that we all have to sacrifice some comforts in order to live more sustainably, and while even I fail to make such sacrifices, it's good that we can notice our mistakes and do a better job the next time.

Commented [CM11]: This piece was not originally going to stay in the paper, it was mainly a place-holder in the first draft, but my peers actually loved this, they said it gave a sense of urgency and calls people out for their excuses. They felt this was very stylistic so I ended up keeping it in see that it was effective in getting my point across.

9News gives a great [list](#) of ways to conserve water including shutting off the faucet while brushing your teeth and doing full loads of laundry rather than just small ones. New and improved lists of ways to be a better water consumer in Denver are posted regularly, so check out what might be best for your circumstance. Whether you're on-campus in dorms or if you're off-campus in a place of your own, there are always ways to improve our domestic water statistic.

So yes, the recent snowfall did help recharge the Denver Basin Aquifer, but already DU's runoff alone has most likely been used up again. Don't use more water than you can give back to the earth, that's just selfish.

Commented [CM12]: I wanted readers to be able to interact with this piece and be able to go do something about the issue at hand rather than just store my words in their brains and probably forget the whole piece later. I searched for good recommendations from people in Denver to give both a relatable and helpful list of ways to help our drought, and 9news was perhaps the best I could find that stayed simple and relatable to DU students.

Commented [CM13]: Again, this wasn't going to stay in the final draft but my peers felt it was great to be called out to reflect on the issue. It was left in to create a lasting effect on readers' minds.