

Get Wild: Thankful for water, in all its forms

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Snow is pictured above Francie's Cabin in Summit County.

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I woke up in early November to a thick blanket of snow draped across the peaks, filling in the valleys. Like a kid on Christmas, I smiled ear-to-ear. While this occurrence used to be common, these days it feels more like a rare treat. This time last year, I was still lubing my bike chain in search of dry trails as warm and sunny weather persisted across Colorado. This year, I'm already reaching for my powder skis. There's no guarantee these white and grey, foot-deep mornings will continue all season, but I'll relish in it while I can.

Winter is changing across our country, and the globe, but it's easiest to notice those changes in the landscapes we call home. I can recall days as a kid, skiing deep, deep, powder in November, and many seasons where it seemed my dad never put the snow blower down. My brother and I would scrape our shovel blades on the sidewalk while he cleared the driveway in time to catch first chair on yet another powder day. A few years ago, my dad sold his snow blower. It took up too much space in the garage, but really, he just didn't need it. A shovel was sufficient for the occasional couple inches he'd need to clear.

The West has been stuck in a megadrought for over two decades now. The Denver Post recently reported that, given the dangerously low levels of the Colorado River, "Reclamation officials ... will consider whether to turn down the faucet on downstream states next year and in 2024." Water is dwindling across the West. But as George Sibley wrote in Issue 198 of the Mountain Gazette, "Really, the



snow surprises us with early-season powder days, it's easy to forget that those powder days are becoming fewer and farther between. We're lucky enough to live at the source — at the base of mountains that slowly shed snowmelt into tributaries that eventually reach the Colorado River, but how often do we think about that? Perhaps we've gotten too good at taking water for granted.

Folks in the West — including those of us in Colorado's High Country — are now faced with a challenge that offers no simple solution. We would be remiss to blame a river for problems we humans have created ourselves. There will be much debate over the coming months and years about how to care for and disperse the water we have.



The Colorado River is pictured in the Grand Canyon. Much of the snow in Summit County eventually feeds the Colorado River as it flows toward the Pacific Ocean.
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As we attempt to solve this, perhaps it's best to first practice gratitude — a custom long held by indigenous tribes across the West. We must not forget that water is precious. When we stand at the sink to pour a glass of water, we should consider where that water comes from. When summer rains douse our forests, we should be thankful that we can breathe clean air. When snow storms bring celebration on the ski slopes, we should remember that it provides more than recreation. That snow, which will eventually melt and flow into the depths of the Grand Canyon and beyond, sustains life in the West. Perhaps if we can learn to be grateful for water in all its forms, we can find a way to be better stewards of our rivers.



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Stasia Stockwell is a Breckenridge local and avid backcountry skier. A true mountain dweller, she feels most at home in the Alpine. Stasia writes primarily for the outdoor adventure realm, with the desire to connect readers from all backgrounds with nature in a meaningful way.

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