

# Roy Otto: 'To your tents, gentlemen. Guns and ammo.'

By Roy Otto For The Tribune

January 4, 2019

[Share \(16\)](#) [Tweet](#) [Comments \(1\)](#)

It is said those were the words of the Union Colonists as they awoke one morning to notice their ditch was dry. Their belief was the neighbors to the northwest, in Fort Collins, were stealing their water.



*Otto*

We are fortunate cooler heads prevailed and, instead of bloodshed, ink was put to paper and Colorado Water Law — first in time, first in right — was created. That same law governs today. A very positive legacy for northern Colorado! I would submit this law demonstrates the Poudre River flows on the power of relationships. What appeared initially to be toxic ultimately became collaborative, and the result is a blessing to many.

This collaboration has happened many times in water negotiations since. The development of the Colorado-Big Thompson Project would be one such example. When we collaborate, when we create solutions to the challenges we face, the river flows properly. When we compete, when we focus just on our own water needs, the river dries, negatively affecting many.

As we approach decision points on pipelines that will transport water to Thornton, I fear the debate sounds too much like, "To your tents, gentlemen. Guns and ammo." When I listen to the dialogue concerning the NISP and Chimney Hollow Reservoir projects, I fear I hear some of that language, as well. The same tone has been heard as Greeley and Fort Collins plan for their water futures in the proposed expansion of the Milton Seaman and Halligan Reservoirs.

I would submit water is northern Colorado's most important piece of infrastructure. We need it to support our collective municipal, agricultural, industrial, environmental and recreational interests. If we

compete, the river runs dry. If we collaborate, we can meet these collective interests. Envision a water future that includes:

1. Interconnected water infrastructure (treatment plants, pipes, ditches, reservoirs) to enhance reliability, improve emergency responses, create economies of scale and foster more opportunities to share resources;
2. Municipalities buy and dry of their own unsustainable urban landscapes and install native landscapes. The water saved is used to sustain agriculture that not only feeds the region and the world but serves as community separators and open spaces;
3. Utility providers and water conservation districts coordinate to protect and preserve flows along the entire stretch of the Poudre River all the way to the confluence with the South Platte (Note: northern Colorado communities, along with Thornton, just signed Phase 2 of a River Flows agreement to achieve this goal).

In conclusion, I'd like to amend my prior statement that water is the most important piece of northern Colorado's infrastructure. WE are. It's about people. As we collaborate, we become a civic infrastructure more than capable of using water wisely. I ask you to consider what our legacy is going to be. Are we going to use verbal guns and ammo, or will we take steps of relational excellence together and leave another blessing to current and future residents? I hope you will join me in choosing collaboration, and that you might have other ideas of what a collaborative water future holds for northern Colorado. A good place to engage in that conversation is the annual Poudre River Forum coming up Feb. 1 at Drake Centre in Fort Collins. [http://prti.colostate.edu/forum\\_2019.shtml](http://prti.colostate.edu/forum_2019.shtml).

— *Roy Otto, Greeley city manager*