“Bring on the Water Markets!” Says New York Times

An article in Times’ business section notes the terrible economics of water in the United States and, especially, the American West. Given the backdrop of California’s crushing drought and a future of climate change and population growth, the author, Eduardo Porter, notes that innovation and regulation will only do so much. Water is far too cheap to truly curb water consumption. He notes problems with the West’s prior appropriation approach to water management as particularly wasteful. He does note various small attempts at markets are emerging, such as a pilot program in the Colorado River Basin. But to truly get water consumption under control, it will take vast changes to water laws and the economics of agriculture, not towing icebergs or draining rivers halfway across the country.

Nature Is Ready to Overhaul Water World-Wide

Moshe Alamaro, of MIT and writing for Nature this week, wants the water sector to follow the lead of telecommunications and electricity and respond to global warming with drastic technological, political, and legal changes. He notes that we need a more rational water sector and to get away from water policy “based on voodoo economics” and subsidies that value noisy, politically-motivated subsidies and short-term solutions.

Brazil is So Dry. How Dry is it? It’s Crippling the Economy and Sao Paolo Almost Out of Water!

Without rain, Sao Paolo, a city twice the size of Los Angeles and South America’s biggest economic powerhouse will be without water reserves in March 2015. Expect coffee prices to go up, but don’t expect the issues of water resources in Brazil to go away soon. The country has never cultivated a water conservation culture, but it has cultivated plenty of agriculture where rainforest once stood. That loss of rain forest has dried up the “flying rivers” of evaporated water out of the forest that used to precipitate on the more populated coast. Short term, Brazil needs rain. Long term, Brazil needs a whole new attitude towards water – something it didn’t adopt the last time it faced major drought in 2001. Only two years until the Olympics in Rio? Yikes. Maybe they’ll follow Beijing’s lead and try cloud seeding.
Republican River Compact Brings Kansas and Nebraska back to the U.S. Supreme Court This Week

The last time Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado fought over the Republican River Compact, they struck a settlement that brought the basin’s groundwater under the Compact’s jurisdiction. Now, they are arguing over imported water brought into the Republican River Basin from the Platte River Basin and Nebraska’s over-allocation of water in years past. Adapting a WWII-era water-sharing compact to current needs and hydrologic knowledge isn’t a simple matter, it seems.

Interstate water disputes regularly go before the Supreme Court, but are a type of case where the justices try to decide as little as possible. They appoint a special master to hear the matter and report to them ahead of oral arguments. Even at oral arguments, they look to get the sides to work it out. Because, as Justice Breyer said, “you’re facing nine people... who couldn’t know less about” water systems.

Mississippi Looks to Take Memphis and Tennessee to the U.S. Supreme Court over Groundwater Consumption

Several years ago, Mississippi sued, in district court, the City of Memphis for using so much water from a shared aquifer that it caused a cone of depression depriving northern Mississippi of groundwater. The case was thrown out because it was deemed a dispute between states that needed to be in the Supreme Court and include the state of Tennessee as a party. This year, Mississippi has petitioned to the Supreme Court to do just that. In addition to the Kansas-Nebraska dispute (above), pending matters before the Court include water disputes among Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico & Florida, Alabama, and Georgia. The nine justices are surely thrilled.

A Moment of Silence for the Aral Sea

Once, it was the world’s fourth largest lake (take that, Lake Michigan!). Sixty years later, it is as good as gone. The lake was fed by rivers that drained snowpack out of the Pamir and Tien Shen Mountains. Then, people started messing with it. The USSR diverted those rivers to create intensive agriculture in an arid climate (think California’s Imperial Valley). Once it started going, it went. Faster and faster as dry years cut the snowpack that fed the system. Now, for the first time in history, the lake’s once-vast Eastern Lobe empty. It is an environmental, cultural, and health disaster, and it could have been avoided. Integrated water management, for a whole suite of uses, easily could have utilized the basin for development and maintained the integrity of a lake the size of Ireland. Instead, it stands as a testament to people’s ability to drastically and tragically alter the surface of the earth.

Anba Dlo Water Symposium This Saturday Open to the Public

This Saturday afternoon Café Istanbul in the New Orleans Healing Center will host the Third Annual Anba Dlo Water Symposium from noon to 4:00pm. The program is focusing on coastal restoration, the associated costs, and wider issues of climate change and subsidence. The question being asked is “What to do if the scientists [predicting sea level rise] are right?” The event is free and even includes a light lunch to be served first come, first serve. Among the speakers are the Institute’s director Mark Davis and program manager Chris Dalbom.

Just Because We’re Almost as Obsessed with Music as We Are With Water

Here in the W.C. at 6325 Freret Street, we’ve started listing songs about water. Why should we have all the fun ourselves? We’re going to do a new theme to this every month or so. So, this month, the theme will be floods. Have any ideas for songs about floods? Send them to Chris Dalbom (cdalbom@tulane.edu). We’ll put the list together and put it up on our website. If we get really ambitious, we may even put a playlist together on Spotify and/or YouTube. Now, get to work!