

DEB McADAMS

Let's protect water, not crows



A group of environmentalists at the University of Nebraska at Kearney recently dressed up as crows and staged a "die-in" to protest a local policy that allowed citizens to shoot Nebraska's biggest consumers of road-kill.

Florida has endangered panthers; Californians struggle to preserve condors; Nebraskans are saving the crows.

Yes, crows, those delightful garbage-strewing, caterwauling carrion. A group of environmentalists at the University of Nebraska at Kearney recently dressed up as crows and staged a "die-in" to protest a local policy that allowed citizens to shoot Nebraska's biggest consumers of road-kill.

Although crows have a habit of flying out of range at the sight of a shotgun, perhaps citizens should let them rummage through the garbage in peace.

Crows can then dehydrate along with the rest of us.

The rights of crows are being defended while Nebraska's greatest natural resource is drying up. In city halls and meeting rooms all over the state, lines have been drawn for the battle of water rights.

Many farmers depend on diverted surface — river — water for irrigation.

Municipal well-fields are being depleted, and LB301 would allow cities to divert surface water for the recharge of those well-fields.

The drought in the late '80s seriously diminished water reserves throughout the Midwest. Colorado also looms large in Nebraska's water-flow picture. As the population grows on the front range, so does Colorado's need to dam the South Platte. Twin Forks is not a dead issue.

There just isn't enough water to go around even though Nebraska virtually floats on the Ogallala Aquifer. The Ogallala is a 225,000 square mile underground sea that flows beneath Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas and most of Nebraska. It was formed by the receding water of the last ice age, some 10,000 years ago. It is believed to be the largest underground reserve of fresh water on earth.

it can recover. Nebraskans have fared better than people in Texas, where areas of the aquifer have dried up, but several counties here have experienced falling water tables. Lower water tables mean deeper wells that become more expensive to operate. Surface water becomes more valuable.

Water quality is compromised by agricultural chemicals such as nitrogen, atrazine and alachlor. Livestock production pollutes water sources with feedlot runoff. Poorly managed cropland can erode at rates as high as 30 to 40 tons per acre annually. Some of that soil ends up in surface water. Sediment is Nebraska's major water pollutant.

Farmers use more than half of the water consumed in the state for production agriculture. They are the most obvious target for critics, whom they feed.

Over two million people drink from the Ogallala, but mostly Nebraskans flush their toilets with it. Forty percent of the water consumed in homes goes down the old porcelain throne. We use another 30 percent for our personal hygiene obsession with daily bathing, although we should probably just be washing our hands more often.

People insist on lush Kentucky Bluegrass golf courses that depend entirely on chemical maintenance and extensive irrigation. They run automatic sprinkler systems with complete disregard for the rivers that run off of the yard and into the sewer. A 3 a.m. summer tour of fast-food franchises provides a good example of water wasted on strip landscaping.

Water depletion in Nebraska is inseparable from the global conditions of the environment, and those conditions are inseparable from our traditional "plunder and don't put back" consumption mentality.

Crows are probably safe. We are probably in trouble.

McAdams is a sophomore news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

The aquifer is recharged through a cycle of rainfall and surface water percolation. What nature took thousands of years to develop, people have upset with a few turns of the moldboard plow. The grasses and forbs that regulated the balance of exponentiations on the Great Plains were swept aside by the fossil fuel age. Corn, soybeans and alfalfa, which transpire at a greater rate than prairie plants, replaced the native flora and created a huge demand for water.

Nebraskans now irrigate 8.5 million acres, second in the country only to California in the amount of land under irrigation. High-pressure pivot irrigation systems can pull water out of the aquifer at a rate of 800 gallons per minute, and much of it is lost to evaporation.

The combined effects mean the Ogallala is being depleted faster than

SAM KEPFIELD

Courts worked first time in LA

A city burns; thousands riot; dozens are killed; millions of dollars in damage are done, all in glorious living color on our TV screens.

Los Angeles last April? Yes — but I'm talking about Los Angeles in a couple of weeks, at the close of the federal civil rights trial of Los Angeles Police Department officers Stacey Koon, Laurence Powell, Timothy Wind and Theodore Briseno.

Jury selection began last week in their trial for violating the civil rights of Rodney King. Coincidentally, the four men accused of beating Reginald Denny during the opening moments of the riots will be tried simultaneously.

It is time to address some of the irresponsibility and idiocy surrounding this whole affair. To begin with, this is not the "Rodney King trial." It is four officers on trial. Rodney King is not on trial here, and he is not the center of the universe, as TV news vendors would have us believe.

King was not on trial for fleeing arrest, nor was he tried for three subsequent offenses — one for trying to run down a vice officer, one for beating his girlfriend over a video cassette recorder — looted, possibly? — and one for theft. Rodney King has been transformed into a sacred cow, who could get away with anything up to, and maybe including, murder in Los Angeles. Let's call him what he is. Not a "motorist," but an ex-con out on parole with the bad judgment and the incredible good fortune of being a TV star and martyr, thanks to a home movie camera.

The entire Los Angeles Police Department is not on trial here, either, as black leaders suggest. While some officers have been guilty of excesses in the past, basing the prosecution on the sins of fellow officers is a perversion of justice.

Let us also address here the appar-



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ently unthinkable and far-fetched proposition that the cops might just beat this rap, too. A civil rights trial is a lot different from a trial for the use of excessive force. The prosecution will have to prove that the police deliberately and intentionally set out to violate King's civil rights.

More likely than not, they were merely trying to subdue someone they believed was dangerous. Remember, if you will, that King led them on a high-speed chase for miles and then, when stopped, rushed the officers. He was hit twice with a taser, 50,000 volts of electricity — enough to drop an ox — and was still upright. The cops believed, justifiably at the time, that he was on PCP. After they started hitting him with nightsticks and telling him to remain down, King kept trying to get up.

Brutal? Yes. Would I wish it on anyone? No. A violation of civil rights? Hardly. It was within the bounds of police procedure, as the first trial demonstrated.

So what happens if the cops should get off, yet the four thugs who beat Reginald Denny get convicted for their acts? If one listens to the likes of John Mack, president of the Los Angeles Urban League, Congressman Maxine "Burn Baby Burn" Waters and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the consensus is: "Well, if we don't get any justice, then we can't guarantee that people will accept this verdict, that they won't riot." Or, as the signs being dusted off by would-be protesters read, "No Justice, No Peace."

Translation: If the four cops don't get hung out to dry by an all-black jury, then the residents of South Central Los Angeles have every right to burn and loot and pillage to vent their rage over an unfair, racist system.

It is this kind of stupidity that worries all concerned. To preordain a verdict turns the affair into nothing more than a Stalin-era show trial, more for public humiliation before one goes to the firing squad than for justice. And what of the jurors? How just is it to tell them that they may be responsible for the potential destruction of a city and untold deaths if they reach the wrong decision? How fundamentally fair is that?

Let's be clear about something. The first time around, the system worked. It did what Waters, Mack and Jackson applaud when the defendant is black — it let them go, on a technicality, after giving them the entire benefit of the doubt. This time around, we should hope that the same procedure is followed and live with it, either way, without torching anything.

Innocent until proven guilty was still the prevailing standard in American justice the last time I checked. It beats the hell out of trial by videotape, which seems to be the alternative.

Kepfield is a graduate student in history and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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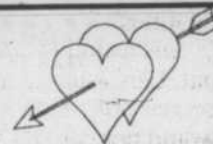
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