

You can't believe what you read in the newspapers

My late grandmother used to say, "If it wasn't true, the newspapers wouldn't be allowed to print it." The world was simpler in her time, I guess. It's different today.

Take for example a recent headline in a local newspaper (Northumberland Echo, July 20, 2011) that proclaimed "Water supply steady for next century." The article beneath the headline reported on a public meeting where the Northern Neck Regional Water Supply Plan was discussed.

Quoting a speaker at the meeting, another newspaper (Rappahannock Record, July 21, 2011) asserted that there should be sufficient water supply for the Northern Neck for the next 100 years.

Setting aside the question of who is to blame for these claims, let's acknowledge that there is little truth in them. In the decades ahead, the water supply of the Northern Neck will be neither steady nor sufficient.

Virtually all of the Northern Neck water supply exists in groundwater aquifers. This groundwater system is shared with our neighbors on the Coastal Plain, who also impact the water supply.

Moreover, we have been pumping water out of this system for more than 150 years, while little water has replenished the supply. It resembles a bank account in which an unlimited number of persons is making withdrawals but nobody is making deposits. Hydraulically speaking, we are going broke.

If we are to enjoy economic prosperity in the future, we must face the fact that our water supply is not limitless. As Will Rogers once observed, "When ignorance gets started it knows no bounds."

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