

Deep Blue Reservations

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 17 April 2014 21:47 - Last Updated Friday, 18 April 2014 21:33

A funny thing happened on the way to the reservoir... *Not*.

In fact, a lot of unfunny things have been happening on the way to absolutely *everywhere*, not just to the water supply. But we might as well start there, especially as someone else led the way -- someone whose cup runneth over, so to say.

The musical question here, for which there are no chairs available on which to sit or catch one's breath, once the music stops, is this: How much does 38 million gallons of water cost? Another question tends to come up right away: Why would anyone want to know? Other questions follow, flowing right along from these initial queries.

If we're talking about money, the cost of the water might also depend on where you price it -- if there's a drought going on, say, or if there's a raging fire nearby that needs a good dousing, and so on. These are all good questions, all very excellent angles worthy of consideration. As is so often the case in life, some questions simply have no satisfactory answers. This is one of those times.

The reason for the question in the first place, the cost of 38 million gallons of water, is because that is how much drinking water a city is dumping, of deferential respect for subscribers, owing to contaminants in the water.

The city is not in India. It's not in Bangladesh. The city is in the rain-rich Pacific Northwest, in the United States -- in Portland, Oregon, to be exact. It is where water is sweet, pure, and still relatively cheap, unlike in so many areas of expanding drought, all over the world, from *that fake climate change thingie*

Let's talk triggers: Fracking, you say? No. Not fracking. Maybe another oil spill from BP or Exxon? No, not BP and Exxon again, although that's a good guess, given the new-spill-a-second track record from that industry. It's not coal ash sludge, as in mining areas. It's not from radioactive catastrophes, ala Fukushima and Chernobyl.

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It's not from toxic chemicals released next to a drinking water intake for a nine county area, as in West Virginia; no, it's not from a dangerous, bozo-based corporate citizen with a cheerily patriotic name, like Freedom Works. Nope, not from a municipal policy created by beanie-wearing navel contemplators. It's not from a thousand different ways we humans have discovered to poison the chief source of the planetary lifeblood, which is water.

No, all 38 million gallons of water are being dumped for reasons that can only be called a combination of political correctness, general squeamishness, full-bore water guardianship, along with a burst of political expediency and self-preservation in a media-centric world, where any issue can become a firestorm.

The cost, by the way, is \$175,115.00. And 21 cents. That's how much you'd pay for that water as a subscriber, based on \$3.44 per hundred cubic meters -- a bargain in today's world, and an absolute steal, given the purity of the city's water from the Bull Run natural reservoir.

(The water in Portland is a point of pride. It is where local teevee fare periodically consists of contests where bottled-water champions take on the city's tap water and are routinely trounced, forcing challengers to slink away, damp tail between their legs once again.)

Yes, you can still get 2-point-17 gallons of water here for a penny. Imagine such a thing in an area of cracked soil, in areas of expanding drought. Imagine such a thing, given all the ways in which we flush that stuff right down the drain, without a second's thought.

Imagine such a thing, given that droughts trigger revolutions, when people can't feed their families, and governments figure the best way they can help their citizens is to throw them in jail for a few years if they complain about the lack of food or government help. Yes, imagine Libya.

Imagine where else Libya will be replicated, as areas of drought expand. Imagine how laughable the stories were, a decade or two ago, when predictions were being made that the next world war would be fought over water...

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But, back to this situation at hand: Imagine why Portland dumped 38 million gallons of its high-quality water, at a cost of \$175,115.00 -- and 21 cents:

It was the world's most expensive rest stop. Yes, someone peed in the water. Whiz Kids? No, more like Whiz Guys, a 19-year-old this time. (Hey, if there can be Wise Guys, there can be Whiz Guys. Let's just hope this latest crop won't be popping up in the movies, too.)

Last time -- *yes, it's happened here before* -- it was *only* about 7.8 million gallons, in 2011, when damages were *only* about \$36,000 or so of dumped water, which includes lost revenue and disposal fees. That time, a 21-year-old was the urinal-cake-headed performer.

Scientists say the average bladder tops out at 6 or 8 ounces; mixed with 38 million gallons of water, or even 7.8 million gallons, the possible health hazards are incredibly low. Still, they have a point: Given a choice of water with *no* urine in it, and water with *some* urine in it, which would *you* choose? Yes, well... There you go. Add to it the political necessity to not consciously serve tainted water, and that's why it's a cinch the water gets dumped.

What's next? In both cases, taxpayers will pick up the tab. The way it's gone before, a few hours of community service is doled out to the whizzer and the case is closed. Somehow, a few hours of labor at a soup kitchen doesn't serve the community and taxpayers very well. It may also not serve diners very well, given the propensity of whizzing bandits to add to existing fluid stocks with some of their own. Talk about an ineffectual tap on the, uh, wrist.

I'm not much for corporal punishment, on rolling out the portable guillotines, but I think we should consider billing the idiots who go out of their way to jerk the system around this way and that, forcing us all to pay for their thoroughly *bozoid* inspirations, like climbing a chain-link fence -- on a full kidney -- just to whizz in the city's drinking water.

You might remember a movement a while back to have purposeful morons billed for their air-sea rescues and the like. (This probably got axed as a good idea, once Republicans realized the percentage of their low-information voters likely to be penalized by such legislation.)

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No, I'm more a type to *withhold* the carrot, so to speak, rather than get out the stick, and demonstrate what a plummeting guillotine blade can *do to a stick...* and to a *carrot*, no matter how stout it is or how tightly held it may be.

Why it is we Americans suddenly have such an issue with our pee is perplexing. I thought we were all pretty well toilet-trained and house-broken by now -- well, except for the Tea Party and right-wing-nut radio hosts, and Fox News, anyway.

Surely you remember the Marines whizzing on the bodies of those they had killed in Afghanistan. (If it's tangled up in your memory with Marines posing with a flag remarkably similar to the Nazi "SS" symbol, you may certainly be forgiven.)

So, in addition to our being viewed as Ugly Americans almost everywhere, and as citizens of a psychotic war state, of a mad-dog military-industrial complex (as warned by the Republican, Dwight D. Eisenhower, back when Republicans were sane, a long, long time ago), Americans now continue to make headlines around the world, simply because of where our idiot offspring are choosing to park their pee.

And you thought we'd moved on, as a species, from flinging our feces around? One look at recent election campaigns should immediately disabuse you of *that* notion! (C'mon, you Tea Party yahoos -- where's your outrage over taxpayers having to spend money to deal with whizzing bandits? Oh, that's right -- you don't believe in *personal* responsibility, just *governmental* responsibility and blame, no matter the facts of any situation.)

You know, there's a *Conserve Water* page at the Portland Water Bureau's site. This is not meant to be ironic by them. City government, even in a mostly-enlightened city like Portland, is still not known for its showy displays of irony. It seems to go against the grain of the horn-blowing, self-important nature of most decorum-obsessed politicians.

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However you might feel about all this, Portland's Benson Bubblers -- 20 bronze water fountains created from a 1912 philanthropist's donation -- are still small wonders of the kind of world we used to have in America, way back when people knew where to put their pee.

* * * * *

Some Florida voters, I am not relieved at all to discover, in this year of Two Thousand and Fourteen, are on the fence regarding the urination rights of voters. I mean, do I have to say it? Ladies and gentlemen of the House Select Committee on Porcelain Rights -- we need to get off the pot and institute an amendment to the Bill of Rights, guaranteeing the right of Americans, and free peoples everywhere, the inalienable right...

* * * * *

Am I *whizzed off*, so to say? Well, on behalf of Portland taxpayers, I can tell you I'm feeling more than a little whizzed *on*.

Epilogue

We've found a new Earth-like planet in the so-called Goldilocks zone -- not too hot, not too cold. Thing is, it's 500 light years away: *Location, location, location*. It's a bit far for a handy commute, once we use up this planet and are looking for a brand new nest to trash, which is something humanity does very, very well.

We do it so well, using up our home, in fact, we should step up the search for a replacement planet. Shifting money over from corporate welfare -- all \$92 billion of it -- to a reboot of the space program is a good idea, too.

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You think that this small series of painful truths regarding our trashing of our homes might snap a set of cosmic fingers in front of our faces, break the hypnotic spell, and create some crash-dive emergency measures -- a total overhaul of human habit and activity, featuring changes of real substance -- all over the globe.

Nope. □ *'Fraid not.* About the best thing you can say for us so far is that we've sifted out one possible keeper planet so far, with 2,800 planets yet to sift through, just on this one exploratory leg alone.

The search continues for intelligent life in the universe, especially *here*.

And, nope, there's no Scotty to beam us up to a reasonable, idealistic *Star Trek* perfection. Heck, our species can't even seem to locate a reasonable facsimile of The Monolith from *2001*

-- a little something to help us jump-start the next phase and plateau of our evolution, and help us increase our chances of survival...

... and to help us find a reason why we *should* survive -- to help us *justify* our survival, should intelligent life be found, and should some other life form actually ask.

Just in case. Call it cheap, blue-sky insurance for a blue-green world -- from those with very deep reservations and very vulnerable reservoirs.

One of thousands of worldwide stories about this watery cock-up:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-27069611>

and:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/04/17/304128931/one-mans-pee-pushes-portland-t-o-flush-38m-gallons-of-water>

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Water cost: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/29415>

2014 Whizzing Bandit: <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/487706>

Bull Run water: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/386143>

Benson Bubblers: <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/article/352768>

Conserve water! <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/water/29334>

2011 Whizzing Bandit: http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2011/06/portland_reservoir_urination_r.html

Afghanistan whizzing:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2085378/US-troops-urinating-dead-Afghan-bodies-video-used-Taliban-recruitment-tool.html>

Reckless rescues:

http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2013/06/bills_would_let_cities_recoup.html

California drought: <http://wthitv.com/2014/04/17/drought-in-california-may-impact-food-prices/>

Libyan drought:

<http://www.treehugger.com/climate-change/how-climate-change-spark-syrian-revolution-Arab-Spring.html>

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Hold everything:

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/broward/broward-politics-blog/sfl-voters-banned-from-using-restrooms-20140409,0,1869709.story>

New world:

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/18/science/space/scientists-find-an-earth-twin-or-maybe-a-cousin.html?_r=1

and:

<http://www.nasa.gov/ames/kepler/nasas-kepler-discovers-first-earth-size-planet-in-the-habitable-zone-of-another-star/#.U1GWj65jD3A>

and: <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/news.php?release=2014-119>

Today's Bonus:

Earth from space: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38peWm76l-U>

Planets like Earth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjnxNGqWrHI>