'Unquenchable' is the title of Robert Glennon's scorching critique of U.S. historical water policy. The word also applies to the University of Connecticut's seemingly unlimited thirst for water.

To ensure the growth of its Technology Park, hedge against drought and deliver on its commitments, the university wants to build a pipeline to Storrs. School officials contend that this place of green pastures, abundant springs, massive aquifers and free-flowing rivers doesn't have enough water to meet UConn's needs.

This plan makes the promoters of UConn's Technology Park sound like those of Las Vegas a century ago. Officials seem to be saying: "If you build it, they will come," meaning water companies with liquid assets eager to sell their increasingly valuable commodity. Already in the lineup are the Metropolitan District Commission, which would sell the flow of the Farmington River; the Connecticut Water Company, whose plan would impact the Hockanum; and the Willimantic Water Works, which would suck from the lower Natchaug.

Thanks to UConn's conservation efforts since 2004, the Tech Park's planned 125,000-square-foot Innovation Partnership Building will not be "reliant" on any new water sources. That's great! My concern is the 10-year plan to plumb up to 900,000 square feet of new working space. This planned commitment doesn't include the Depot campus, what Mansfield needs for future growth and the unplanned sprawl that will surely follow the increased number of spigots fed by imported water.

Whatever happened to sustainability? Of living within one's limits? Of reducing local vulnerability to distant utility grids?

The Environment Impact Evaluation, known as the EIE, for this project runs hundreds of pages. I read it all, struggling to understand why such a plan comes from the Office of Environmental Policy, which is genuinely committed to environmental leadership.

The EIE (online at www.envpolicy.uconn.edu/eie.html) considers three basic alternatives: take no action, develop additional groundwater resources and import water. The first alternative was a non-starter, an unthinkable straw man to be knocked down. The second received due consideration but was tossed out for reasons I take issue with. The third alternative of importing water quickly emerged as the only one being considered.

The importation alternative involves pumping about 2 million gallons more per day from lower elevations to the sinks, toilets and lawns of the upper Thames River watershed in Mansfield. This constitutes a vertical lift of at least 300 feet for an additional 17 million pounds of water per day. As with water being pumped today, this would be accomplished with electric pumps that will be almost certainly be powered by carbon- or uranium-based fuels.

Two of the pipeline scenarios would rob Peter to pay Paul; in this case, impact the flow of streams draining to the Connecticut River to pay for flushes draining away from it. What good is regional watershed planning if it's an exercise to be ignored when decisions need to be made? Why not redirect water from less critical UConn projects, for example, the water being used to irrigate private proprietary research behind my house in Storrs?

I ask that no pipeline be built, if only to show students how local sustainability works. I ask that the Office of Environmental Policy revisit the issue of water conservation, reprioritize existing uses and field-test the groundwater options in Mansfield Hollow. Or, if UConn is truly committed to building a
new "city upon a hill," then a pipeline connected to the Willimantic Water Works makes the most sense because it co-locates the problem and the solution in the same political and natural jurisdictions. It’s also least expensive.

I’m not alone in my opinion. With me for the local option are the Mansfield Conservation Commission, the town’s director of planning and development and other local groups. With me against interbasin transfers are a host of other nonprofit groups, notably the Rivers Alliance of Connecticut and potentially impacted towns. Comments may be emailed to jason.coite@uconn.edu by Jan. 31. A public hearing is scheduled for 7 p.m. Tuesday at the UConn Health Center’s Munson Building in Farmington.

The EIE has carefully considered the socioeconomics, engineering and regulatory compliance.

Why not extend comparable consideration to the higher ground of natural resource ethics?