

# Colorado Basin Roundtable

## Introduction

Why a vision statement?

The Colorado Basin Roundtable, one of nine chartered statewide by the Colorado General Assembly as a means to help solve statewide water supply shortages through greater public involvement, has been meeting since 2005 and over time has developed many views toward the protection and future development of the Colorado River. This document serves as a reference of these views. The policies expressed herein will be used by the Roundtable as a prism by which to judge proposals regarding Colorado River development.

We acknowledge the interdependence of the varied Basin water users, protecting the water and river flows that will insure the future for all of us. We also recognize that the influence of historic drought patterns, the uncertainty of climate change, population growth, energy development and compact compliance are interwoven with this vision. Much of its success depends on how we collectively adapt to these forces

## Part 1. Vision Statement

The Colorado River Basin Roundtable envisions a Colorado River basin that is home to thriving communities benefiting from vibrant, healthy rivers and outstanding water quality that provides for all the Basins needs.

## Part 2. Sub-vision on uses and purposes

## **Maintain viable commercial, irrigated agriculture**

**Agriculture is** extremely valuable to the basin, economically, socially, environmentally and culturally, and it secures food supply, keeps water in the streams and supports wildlife.

## **Municipal and Industrial uses in the Basin**

**In 1922, the Colorado River Compact** allowed Colorado to grow at its own pace. The West Slope needs to have the certainty of a secure water supply to be able to grow at its own pace as a desirable place to live and work. We believe this future growth must occur in concert with our agricultural and environmental values.

## **Non-consumptive – environmental - recreational uses in the Basin**

**The health and viability of our streams** and rivers must be protected in the exercise of water rights. Environmental and recreation uses of our rivers and streams are vital to the West Slope economy and are of irreplaceable value to all Coloradans.

## **Energy uses in the Basin**

**Energy development** must be recognized as a potential major water user in the Basin. Water used in energy development shall not degrade the water quality in the Basin. Energy development should employ technology that is the most efficient and sustainable.

## **Compact compliance**

**Compliance with the Colorado River Compacts** is a statewide responsibility because Colorado River users reside on both sides of the Continental Divide. Colorado, as a member of the Upper Basin, shares

an obligation to deliver 75 million acre feet on a running 10-year average to the Lower Basin. Overdevelopment of the Colorado River threatens the certainty, upon which current water users depend. Current users on both sides of the Continental Divide rely on a river free of compact administration.

Compact administration in the Colorado River Basin must be avoided. Impacts from a compact curtailment, or strategies to avoid a compact curtailment, must be borne equitably by all Colorado River uses.

\*\*\* (peg new junior consumptive????)

### Part 3. Sub-vision on methods and tools to achieve the desired uses and purposes

It is recognized that future M&I water supply will come from a combination of agriculture, conservation, reuse and a possible additional trans-mountain diversion out of the Colorado River Basin.

#### **The role of agriculture in Colorado**

Our vision is to preserve a viable agriculture in Colorado – on both the west and east slope. Agriculture provides food independence, open space, wildlife habitat, cultural values and economic activity. We realize that the free market of water rights, some agriculture will be lost at either a producers choice or by municipalities seeking a secure water supply. To the extent that agriculture is a source of water for growth is under pressure, Colorado must develop a system for the best management of transfers. Any water savings that occur should be retained within the basin where those savings occur in order to help ensure orderly growth, provide for healthy rivers, preserve agriculture

and help protect the West Slope from the impacts of a compact call. Ag efficiency should benefit the owner of the water right.

### **The role of conservation in agriculture**

Lining of ditches, sprinkler and drip systems are important tools of salinity control and water conservation. Return flows are also important factors in water supply. Colorado must thoroughly investigate the costs, benefits and unintended consequences of helping agriculture become as efficient as possible while allowing the producer to benefit from his or her efficiency and not lose their water rights because of efficiency.

### **The protection of agriculture in Colorado**

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### **Municipal conservation**

Municipal water conservation and efficiency measures will be implemented and enforced. Colorado water providers must improve and replace damaged and leaky infrastructure. The EPA estimates up to 25%-30% or more of municipal water loss. Water providers must create rate structures that discourage water waste.

### **Front Range system integration**

In view of our many objectives, we believe part of the water supply solution lies in the linking of municipal systems and infrastructure on the Front Range for the combining of water supply needs. System interconnection would improve efficiency and spread the risk of basin wide drought so that no single provider is faced with a dire shortage situation when others may step in to help.

## **Land use planning**

Growth is important to both sides of the Continental Divide and if it is not paced and measured against reliable water supplies, unfettered growth in one section of the state could freeze growth in others.

Land use planning must link water supply and availability with future development and growth. Examples abound of development built upon unsustainable water supply. There are inherent water conflicts between uncoordinated growth and the Colorado values of sustaining agriculture, maintaining healthy streams, a recreational economy and water for other industrial development. Maintaining Coloradans' quality of life while balancing limited resources with unlimited demand requires thoughtful and coordinated planning.

## **Energy**

Identify, evaluate and encourage multi use projects that help meet direct and indirect needs of energy development while also helping to meet current and projected municipal, agricultural, instream non-consumptive and recreational uses.

## **Nonconsumptive use needs in Colorado**

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## **The role of trans-mountain diversions**

While the state of Colorado has a direct allotment of water in the Colorado river via the Colorado River compact, actual water availability year to year is uncertain, and future development increase the risk of

shortage in-state and the potential for triggering a lower basin compact call.

Any trans-mountain diversions must be considered as the last resort to support Front Range growth. All possible means of using native water supplies and existing supplies of trans-mountain water to their fullest must be employed. Leasing of agriculture water, agricultural irrigation efficiency, land use reforms, reuse and municipal conservation best practices must be implemented before any new trans-mountain diversions are proposed.

Opportunities exist for reoperation of headwater storage reservoirs that could benefit water needs and rivers on both sides of the Divide. These opportunities must be pursued and implemented as a means for reducing any future trans-mountain diversions. Reoperations should also be employed to create a broader range of benefits beyond the singular purpose of a reservoir.

The Colorado Basin currently hosts a significant number of Transmountain Diversions that provide considerable benefits to the Front Range of Colorado. In some cases the resulting river and water supply conditions force in-basin water providers to take drastic measures to address their own growth. (i.e. down-zoning and property buy-back in Grand County).

West Slope nonconsumptive needs must be fulfilled as a condition of any future transmountain diversion, as well as West Slope municipal, industrial and energy future development needs.

## **The role of reuse**

All possible methods and practices of water re-use shall be implemented. All existing transmountain diversions shall be used and re-used to extinction, within legal limits.

## **The Shoshone Call**

The senior water rights assigned to the Shoshone Hydro Plant are nonconsumptive and can provide a de facto minimum stream flow in the Colorado River on a 12-month basis. This call also goes a long way toward satisfying the Cameo Call in most years, keeping that call off the river. The Shoshone Call also helps maintain water quality in the river, an important issue for water users, especially on the middle and lower river segments. The Shoshone Call shall be preserved and protected for the benefit of the West Slope. This is nonnegotiable.

## **Additional storage**

Additional water storage looms as part of the West Slope's water supply solution. It must be recognized that new storage will be required and that every opportunity should be taken to utilize existing storage systems through improvement or enlargement, especially reservoirs that are limited by order of the State Engineer.

## **Compact administration**

We support the Colorado Compact curtailment insurance plan under development by the Southwestern Water Conservation District and the Colorado River District as a coherent way of forestalling a compact curtailment or implanting one. In the absence of such plan and the event of a compact curtailment, we support the State Engineer's Office

developing a plan that would identify junior water rights holders that were developed at the risk of triggering a call and call them out first before affecting senior water rights holders. Protection of water supplies and uses within all basins of the West Slope must be maximized.

### **Pre 1922 water rights**

Pre-1922 water rights on the West Slope are under constant threat of abandonment due to disuse, poor records or through change of use cases. These rights will be important to the West Slope in the event of a compact curtailment and must be protected as much as is practicable.

#### Groundwater

(groundwater and surface water conjunctive management not well studies) Issue of ag transfers starving domestic wells.

### **The future**

No one thing by itself is going to solve Colorado's water supply shortage. Solutions will come from an integration of many strategies including new storage, reuse, agriculture and municipal conservation and wise land use planning. The state should adopt an intra-state compact which incorporates these elements.

Agriculture, however, will not likely survive without augmentation of the system or other help. To this extent, we see Colorado participating in a desalination program on the Pacific Coast or importation of water from outside the region, i.e. Mississippi, Missouri, Columbia basin waters.

