

Colorado Water Plan

Southwest Colorado Statement of Importance

January 2014

Background:

Last spring, Governor Hickenlooper issued an Executive Order requesting that all state water interests work together in the development of the Colorado Water Plan and address the identified M&I “Gap”. The CWCB is coordinating the efforts with input from the IBCC and Basin Round Tables (BRT), and a draft of the plan is to be ready by December of 2014, and final plan by December 2015. Various positions have been expressed by multiple groups and entities on either the plan itself or the New Supply aspect (4 legs of stool). These groups include; the South Platte and Arkansas BRT’s, Front Range entities (FRWC), the West Slope Basin Round Table (new supply), and municipal providers in the Grand Junction area led by Ute Water. The southwest portion corner of Colorado is in a somewhat unique position, since historically it has not been the source of Colorado River supplies for the Front Range needs. Even so, it does have a major federal trans-mountain diversion Project that deliveries supplies to New Mexico interests in the Rio Grande basin. The San Juan-Chama Project diverts around 100,000 af per year out of tributaries to the San Juan River in Colorado. Southwest Colorado is also home to two Indian Reservations and sovereign nations dating back to 1868. The Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and Southern Ute Indian Tribe have built partnerships with the local communities and are partners with non-tribal interests in a number of major water projects in the region. The Southwest BRT is also somewhat different than other West Slope roundtables, since the Southwest roundtable geographic area is all within the Southwestern Water Conservation District boundaries, which encompass nine separate and unique sub-basins. The remaining three Western Slope Roundtables are within the Colorado River District which includes the Gunnison, Yampa/White, and Colorado mainstem. Consumptive and Non-Consumptive interests have worked well on collaborative processes in the southwestern portion of the state, and it is important that we maintain these partnerships and focus on the issues that are the most relevant to this region. Below is a list of core principles that have been discussed and adopted by the board members and staff from the Southwestern Water Conservation District, and by the Southwest Basin Roundtable:

Statement:

On May 14, 2013, Governor Hickenlooper issued Executive Order D 2013-005, which directed the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to commence work on the Colorado Water Plan (the Plan). Every major river basin in the State has been enlisted to assist in the development of the Plan to be finalized by December 10, 2015. Although the Plan is intended to address several statewide issues of importance its primary function is to address the gap between water supply and water demand. The Southwestern Water Conservation District (SWCD) and the Southwest Basin Roundtable (SWBRT) share the same geographic boundary that include nine separate and unique sub-basins that flow independently across statelines into New Mexico and Utah. The SWCD and SWBRT also share the same values, and commit to assist in the development of Colorado’s Water Plan based on the following principles:

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- Colorado's Water Plan (the Plan) should be used as a guiding document to assist with the development of consumptive, non-consumptive, and multi-purpose projects.
- The portion of the Plan for southwest Colorado should identify specific and unique projects that are important to maintaining the quality of life in this region and should accommodate the development of domestic supplies, environmental needs, agriculture, recreation, and commercial/industrial needs to provide for further economic development.
- The Plan will be used as a guiding document for the full development of Colorado's entitlement under the Colorado River Compact and Law of the River.
- Development of the Compact Entitlement should attempt to limit the risk of Compact administration in the future.
- The SWCD and SWBRT agree that all uses are important to the future of this region, and the development of multi-purpose projects (including the creative management of existing facility and the development of new storage as needed) within the southwest basin should be pursued.
- The Colorado Plan should recognize the downstream challenges faced by water users in southwest Colorado due to continued development and pressures from users in the State of New Mexico. The State of Colorado should utilize its resources to protect the interests in southwest Colorado, while complying with existing Compact obligations. The entitlement to Colorado River flows for New Mexico will be based on deliveries from southwest Colorado.
- The Plan should recognize the unique settlement of tribal reserved water rights claims in the 1988 Tribal Water Rights Settlement and the 1991 Consent Decree.
- The Southwest Basin supports the implementation of conservation strategies and the full development of existing supplies within the Front Range basins that will reduce the demands in the Colorado River Basin.
- The Southwest Basin recognizes a common interest with other Western Slope Roundtables and supports coordination with the Colorado River District and other West Slope Roundtables to minimize the risk of overdevelopment of the Colorado River supplies.
- The Southwest Basin supports the concurrent development of all four legs of the stool that have been identified by the IBCC, and discussed by the Southwest Basin Roundtable.
- The SWCD and SWBRT support the concept of a Water Bank, which may be used to prevent or minimize the risk of Compact administration.
- The SWBRT and SWCD believe Colorado's Water Plan should be a "living document" that can be revisited and updated as necessary to provide for adaptive management in meeting the future demands of the State.
- The SWCD and the SWBRT commit to full productive participation in the development of Colorado's Water Plan, and will stress the importance of inclusion of the components of the Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) to address future needs in the southwest part of Colorado.