

# Grand Valley's Principles for the Colorado State Water Plan

Numerous studies of the Colorado River Basin have identified four broad categories of beneficial use for water: municipal and industrial, agricultural, recreational, and environmental. Further, these studies indicate that a significant gap exists between future water availability and the demand for water to meet our needs in these four areas. Additional water demands for municipal and industrial use have been more thoroughly studied, while the needs for additional water to meet recreational and environmental needs are less understood. No real consideration of the existence of a gap in agricultural use of water has been studied. Since the vast majority of the state's water supply is currently used to meet agricultural demands this use is currently being used as a source for closing the gap for municipal and industrial use. This practice of buy and dry is found to be unacceptable by everyone in the water community.

The availability of water in the Colorado River system to meet future needs is controversial at best. A recent study conducted for the Colorado Water Conservation Board estimates there is anywhere from 0-800,000 acre feet of water left available for future diversions and storage. Under our Colorado River Compact obligations the state may well be legally entitled to additional water but there remains considerable doubt as to whether or not additional use will hinder our ability to meet our compact obligations to downstream states. Additionally, trans-mountain diversions and additional storage high up in the headwaters region have detrimental impacts on water quality dramatically increasing the cost of providing water for downstream communities and agriculture such as those located in the Grand Valley.

The impact of climate change on the Colorado River Basin only adds to the uncertainty about our water future. Various studies may differ on the amount of precipitation that will occur in the headwaters but there does seem to be a general consensus that future precipitation will include less snow and more rain with earlier and faster spring runoffs. Increased future water use by Coloradoans along with the requirements to meet our obligations under compacts with downstream states heightens the problems caused by climate change in meeting our future water needs.

The anticipated increased scarcity of available water has led to efforts to ensure an equitable distribution of water across the various categories of beneficial use. Currently, water is allocated through a quasi-free market system based on prior appropriation and beneficial use. There is some support from members of the water community for a Colorado Trust Initiative that would overturn existing water law and eliminate water as a private property right. Additional challenges to existing state water law come from the federal government. The U. S. Forest Service is currently involved in a struggle over water rights with ski areas operating on Forest Service lands that may have significant implications for other water users operating on federal lands.

Finally, in an effort to prepare the state for its uncertain water future, the Governor is directing the Colorado Water Conservation Board to work with the Interbasin Compact Committee and the basin roundtables to develop a draft Colorado Water Plan for review by his office no later than December 10, 2014. This plan is intended to determine the best way to close the gap between future water supplies

and water demand. Currently the gap between the two is estimated to be roughly 500,000 acre feet by 2050. The Colorado Water Plan will build on the work done by the Colorado Water Conservation Board in its Statewide Water Supply Initiative and the effort of the Interbasin Compact Committee and the various Basin Roundtables.

The Colorado Water Plan will attempt to close the anticipated gap between water supply and demand while limiting to the greatest extent possible the loss of irrigated agricultural land. To do this the focus will be on greater water conservation, alternatives to agricultural buy and dry tactics, development of the processes and projects identified in the Statewide Water Supply Initiative, and future water storage projects. The belief is that some combination of these efforts will allow the state to meet its demands for water in 2050. The reality is that each of these approaches rather than closing the gap simply reallocates the gap between the four general categories of beneficial use. The Colorado Water Plan is an effort to find the least objectionable means of re-allocating water between agriculture, municipal and industrial, recreational and environmental uses.

Currently the Interbasin Compact Committee is attempting to develop the No/Low Regrets Action Plan that will identify those compromises designed to help us meet our future water needs that are least objectionable to all elements of our water community. Efforts to pick this low hanging fruit are proving difficult. As growth continues, future compromising required to meet water demand will only become more contentious. There simply is not enough water available in the system to meet all of the demands of proponents for each of the four categories of use. Each iterative round of compromises will leave everyone involved in the discussion less and less satisfied with the results. These trade-offs may help us get to 2050 but without a plan to further augment existing water supplies with water from outside the Colorado River Basin the future of irrigated agriculture, continued recreation and the quality of our environment will be questionable at best

Any responsible state water plan must acknowledge these conditions. The state should continue to work with local communities, water providers, and irrigators in an effort to meet their constituents' demands for water. At the same time it is imperative for state officials to engage officials from the federal government and the other basin states in developing, implementing and paying for an augmentation plan that will meet the future needs of all the states currently dependent on Colorado River water.

**It is the belief of the undersigned organizations that any state water plan be designed to achieve the following objectives:**

- Protect the cornerstones of our economy which include agriculture, resource extraction, recreation and tourism
- To the fullest extent possible prepare the state for a potential Compact Call
- Protect and improve the health and water quality of our river basins
- Prepare the state for expected impacts from climate change
- Promote and protect our agricultural heritage
- Preserve and promote local control of planning for community development and the associated water needs
- To the fullest extent possible, ensure that federal agencies operate within existing state water law
- Ensure that any future upstream water diversions protect and maintain water quality for downstream users
- Implementation of a long term, regional water augmentation program

**To achieve these objectives, the Colorado Water Plan should include the following practices:**

- Work with other Colorado Compact states and the federal government on developing, funding and implementing a long term water augmentation program.
- Respect existing local water supply plans, land use plans, water quality plans and other related documents adopted by local governments
- Local government regulatory tools adopted to mitigate impacts of water projects should be recognized and protected
- Promote the use of alternative means to limit the practices of “buy and dry” of agricultural lands
- Promote viable storage or enlargement of in-basin water storage projects
- Encourage agricultural water conservation efforts by allowing net water savings to be marketed independently
- Protect existing state water law
- Avoid state mandates on local government, water providers and irrigators
- Develop a water bank to assist in meeting a compact call
- Promote cooperation and collaboration between local domestic water providers and irrigation companies
- Create economic incentives to promote “green” hydro-electric projects
- Promote river clean-up projects such as desalinization in Glenwood Springs and Dotsero on the Colorado River
- Any inter-basin water project must ensure that the impacts to the basin of origin are either avoided or fully mitigated
- Protect the prior appropriation doctrine
- Protect the important role that senior agricultural water rights play in maintaining a healthy environment, endangered fish flows and in meeting the flows of a 1922 Compact Call. (i.e. Grand Valley senior irrigation water rights)

**Acceptance of the Grand Valley's Principles for the Colorado State Water Plan is acknowledged as follows:**

**CITY OF FRUITA**

**By:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY OF GRAND JUNCTION**

**By:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**CLIFTON WATER DISTRICT**

**By:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**GRAND VALLEY IRRIGATION COMPANY**

**By:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**GRAND VALLEY WATER USERS ASSOCIATION**

**By:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**MESA COUNTY IRRIGATION DISTRICT**

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**ORCHARD MESA IRRIGATION DISTRICT**

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**PALISADE IRRIGATION DISTRICT**

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**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TOWN OF PALISADE**

**By:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**UTE WATER CONSERVANCY DISTRICT**

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