

Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to mine the recollections of people who experienced compact administration first hand in the Arkansas, Rio Grande and Republican River Basins in order to see what insights might be useful for users of Colorado Basin water as they contemplate the potential for compact administration, mitigation measures and other water supply challenges.

Interviewees were very generous in reflecting on their communities' experiences with compact administration and ongoing efforts to come into and remain in compliance. While each basin has its own unique history, compact and hydrology, the following lessons transcend these differences:

- Letting compact issues get settled in court is risky and hazardous. Each of the basins came out of court cases with requirements to cut water use in ways that were very difficult for their communities and very constrained options for how to do so.
- Confronting the limits of a water supply is a painful experience. Learning that water is not as available as previously thought forces people to change their mindset, which provokes resistance. This is not easy, but it is a necessary step to minimize the negative impacts of compact compliance. In the Republican River Basin, a widespread lack of awareness of compact obligations initially hindered movement towards compliance, reducing the community's options as legal conflict continued.
- For communities to be proactive in developing their own solutions to address issues with compact compliance, certain conditions needed to be in place. These included the will and confidence to act, strong leadership, and organizations with the capacity to facilitate the development and implementation of solutions. In the Rio Grande Basin, prior experiences of working together to defeat water exports helped build the will, confidence, and organizational capacity to work together on compact compliance and groundwater sustainability issues.
- Relationships and trust within the community of water users, between water users and officials, and between different compact parties are all necessary for the parties to be able to work together towards mutually beneficial solutions. In all the basins, extensive communication and collaborating on tangible projects helped lay the groundwork for ongoing work together on compact compliance issues.
- Precise measurement of water use provides transparency, accountability, and a common understanding of how water systems work. This lays a foundation for addressing problems and making improvements. In the Arkansas Basin, this has been very important for identifying ways to augment streamflows depleted by efficiency enhancements.
- Carrots and sticks, or incentives and penalties, have both played important roles in guiding each of the basins towards compliance. Past experiences with the stick of forced curtailment has strongly motivated communities to work proactively towards the carrot of self-determination.
- Across each of the basins, earlier action to address potential compact and supply issues has enhanced the control communities have to develop and choose their own, less painful, options.

“ When asked directly what advice they would share with others concerned about the potential for compact curtailment, interviewees echoed the themes that emerged when talking about their own experiences. Several reflected that the earlier communities confronted the need to act, the more options and local control they could have. They also underscored the benefits of good measurement and working with partners to solve problems and make the most of limited water supplies.

One farmer and ditch manager in the Rio Grande Basin urged confidence in the capacity of those who know the local context best to take the lead. Describing his own situation, he recounted,

“ I always told my board, “I can't think of a better board to make a decision than ours. So let's step out and do it. I mean, let's make it work for us. Let everybody else follow.”

It is our hope that this report can help spark and inform conversations among users of Colorado Basin water about how they can build upon the advantages they already possess and lay additional groundwork for working together, taking the lead in guiding their own water future.