

Transmountain Water Diversions
Adopted March 16, 2000;
Revised & readopted July 19, 2005
Revised and readopted April 16, 2008
Revised and readopted July 2011

Transmountain Water Diversions

Colorado River Water Conservation District Policy Statements:

The Colorado River Water Conservation District (River District) believes there is no current or reasonably foreseeable need for new transmountain diversion projects. Transmountain diversion of Colorado River water results in adverse economic, environmental, and recreational impacts. Front Range water demands can be met through a combination of better groundwater management, conservation, reuse, system interconnections, re-operations, and in-basin transfers and exchanges.

Nevertheless, transmountain diversion proposals are likely to persist. Accordingly, the River District will continue its historical willingness to examine fairly and thoroughly all project proposals and to work with willing project proponents to determine if an acceptable project can be developed that provides genuine benefits to both the receiving and exporting basins. The River District will advocate for and pursue full water-related mitigation for every transmountain project. Present and future West Slope water uses, including environmental and recreational needs, must be recognized and protected.

The River District will ensure that mitigation conditions on existing transmountain diversion projects are honored and upheld for the protection of in-basin water users and local environments. Additionally, the River District will advocate that the transmountain diverted waters be efficiently used and fully reused to extinction.

Transmountain diversion projects seeking re-operations resulting in expansion of historical use must consult with the basin from which water is being diverted. Alternative re-operation regimes should include those that protect and benefit both the diverter and the basin-of-origin.

Background:

The vast majority of Colorado's water is on the western side of the Continental Divide, while Colorado's population lives predominantly along the Front Range on the state's eastern slope. As a result, Colorado has dozens of water projects that divert water from the Colorado River basin across the Divide. These projects range from small projects diverting a few hundred acre feet of water per year to the Colorado-Big Thompson (C-BT) Project, which diverts an average of more than 220,000 acre feet annually.

Transmountain diversion of water is 100% consumptive for the basin-of-origin. As such, transmountain diversion projects, especially larger transmountain diversions, often have unique

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and significant impacts on the basin from which the water is diverted. Therefore, water diverted across the Continental Divide must be used, reused whenever legally allowable, and be integrated into an overall program of water conservation.

The primary goal of the River District is the protection of existing water uses and preservation of future economic opportunities for the residents of Western Colorado. The River District is committed to meeting the present and future water needs of its residents.

The River District supports the completion and refinement of the State-wide Water Supply Investigation (SWSI) studies. The River District also supports the House Bill 05-1177 process of basin-by-basin review and identification of both consumptive and non-consumptive water needs and potential supply alternatives. Additionally, the River District has been involved in and is committed to several cooperative efforts designed to address or meet specific, identified Front Range water supply problems. Presently, these include:

- The Eagle River Memorandum of Understanding which seeks to identify and develop additional Eagle River water supplies for both East Slope (Colorado Springs and Aurora, and Denver) and Eagle River basin water users in a manner acceptable to West Slope interests;
- The Douglas County Water Resource Authority-Denver Water-River District collaborative water supply investigation addressing water supply needs of the Authority's members in Douglas and Arapahoe Counties, as well as the more recent "WISE" water project to share reusable water supplies from Denver and Aurora with the southern metro area;
- The Upper Colorado River study addressing water supply, water quality, instream flow and water-based recreation needs in the Upper Colorado River basin; and
- The mediated settlement with Denver Water for a proposed comprehensive resolution of mainstem Colorado River issues, named the "Colorado River Cooperative Agreement."

The River District acknowledges that any or all of these efforts may result in additional transmountain water diversions, but any such diversion will be accomplished only with the acceptance and involvement and to the mutual benefit of East Slope and West Slope interests.

Western Colorado's economy is increasingly dependent on tourism-related construction and recreational industries that rely on adequate stream flows and healthy river systems. As such, adequate protections for all Western Colorado water uses, including non-consumptive environmental and recreational uses, benefit the entire state.