Water Banking
Wolford Mountain Reservoir
Sustaining Agriculture
Recreational Economy
Lower Gunnison Project
Legislative Progress
Water Quality
Lake Powell Uncertainties

Colorado River District
Protecting Western Colorado Water Since 1937
2016 ANNUAL REPORT
The Colorado River District continues to protect the water resources of Colorado’s West Slope for the benefit of its residents, as one measure towards a sustainable future. One can see it at work in the past. The threats to our water are real and not just in the past, and the plan is not going away as we move into our 80th anniversary in 2017.

The major cause of these threats is the growth in population that depends on the Colorado River for its very life in Colorado and Utah, as well as the “high plains” towns of eastern Colorado that tap the river’s waters’ transmountain diversions, through which they also obtain water rights to large schools as well, to the many Lower Basin municipalities, that depend on the river and its increasing demands and a potentially limited supply.

The Colorado River District continuously assists the Lower Basin while protecting the interests of its many constituencies. The River District is working to construct a technical platform for further discussions of balancing water demands and supply by following the Principles included in Chapter 8 of the Plan, with a current focus on Principle 4, a collaborative plan to manage the risks to existing water users and a reasonable increment of new users, which is part of a regional collaboration led by federal levels grappled with the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

The Yampa River, as already noted, has successfully marked the installation of fish net on-Elkhead Reservoirs, and is determined to reduce spills of non-native fish into the Yampa River. Fever, to control the threats of the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program.

To the East, the District, the Yampa Region, and the Southwestern Water Conservation District have been working since 2014 on a Regional Plan. This Plan study designed to answer questions that impact the potential of Colorado River Compact dems for improving actions into the future. It is not an attempt to reduce levels on Lake Powell.

This effort helps develop a shared water management approach. Our comprehensive planning, including the development of technical platforms and information necessary to achieve stability and understand the future of our current water uses and the potential for future development. A large portion of the District’s role is to educate water users and the public about these issues.

In 2016, Colorado’s Water Plan moved forward in a progress that is still not complete. But, the goals for the future are in place and have been set. We can now see the promise that will be fulfilled.

Our Board of Directors includes representatives from all 15 of our 15 counties. Property owners within the District pay a small tax on their property to support our mission. Our mission is to provide assistance to our mission, but space limits our ability to tell you how much we value his efforts.

Beyond their policy matters, the District is committed to communicate projects to improve water use and to let us know how available staff are working on projects across the District. In the construction, they have a free, open, and confidential work environment.

Our area of concern is to assist water users and to let us know how we value his efforts.

The Colorado River District protects water resources on behalf of the 500,000 people in northwest and west-central Colorado and the 500,000 people in Utah and western Nevada.

The Colorado River District also watches to protect the Yampa River Basin from the impacts of shortage in order to maintain levels in Lake Powell and (c) reducing demands in the Upper Colorado River Basin. We are noting changes after 2020. By 2020, the Colorado River District will have had an incredible impact on both the River District and the entire Colorado River basin. Eric is retiring in 2016.

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Additionally, the Colorado River District has worked to support Wolford-Moon Valley and Bear Valley as an important part of our mission. We completed expansion of Elkhead Reservoir in 2006.
I was reading an article about the negotiations among the Lower Basin states concerning their use of Colorado River water when I came across the phrase “after 16 years of drought.” I’m concerned because the term “drought” implies conditions will get better but the reality may be otherwise.

In theory, we can make the case that the Colorado River Basin is in a drought. If we look at inflows to Lake Powell over the last 16 years or since the year 2000, they’ve been below the long-term average. However, if we look to our local conditions in Colorado, we are certainly not in a drought. In fact, since the flooding rains in the fall of 2013, I believe we’ve been in a time of relative plenty or “pluvial” (the opposite of drought).

If Colorado has not been in a drought, and Colorado’s mountains produce about two-thirds of the total runoff of the Colorado River system, then why is total storage in Lake Powell and Lake Mead continuing to decline?

Demand Exceeds Colorado River Supply

I believe there are several reasons: First, the demand for Colorado River water in the Lower Basin exceeds the supply. As required by the 2007 Interim Operating Criteria, Lake Powell has occasionally delivered a little extra water to Lake Mead. It did so in 2015 and 2016. Even with this extra water, the demand for water below Lake Mead exceeds its inflow, thus it continues to lose storage, which in turn requires Lake Powell to continue delivering extra water. This means that even with decent inflows to Lake Powell, it can’t gain storage. Lower Basin water officials refer to the overuse as the “structural deficit.” It is about 1.2 million acre-feet of water annually. An acre-foot is 325,851 gallons.

The Lower Basin is working on solutions to reduce its overuse, but the solutions will be painful. Thus it’s easier to refer to what is happening in the basin as a “16-year drought.”

Second, it’s looking more and more likely that warming regional temperatures have turned above-average or abundant precipitation into just average runoff. Recently published scientific papers have zeroed in on this problem, and the consequences of warming on the Colorado River basin are very serious. Warming is reducing runoff.

If Drought Recurs, Reduced Powell and Mead Levels Would Not Cushion It

I’m putting out a warning. If we are headed for a real drought as opposed to a talking point, the consequences for the Colorado River basin are frightening. Unlike the beginning of the 2000-2004 drought when Lake Powell and Lake Mead were essentially full, today they are only at about 40 percent of combined capacity. What does this mean for Western Colorado? The answer is that we can’t be fooled by talk of continuing drought and the automatic thought that things will get better. Instead, we need to address the current reality, to be diligent and fully prepared for the next real drought.

This means a continued focus on conservation, the development of drought contingency plans, the wise use of our existing water resources and where possible, the expansion of reservoirs. Finally, we need to better inform and educate our public on the vulnerability of our water resources. If indeed, our current pluvial is replaced by real drought in the next few years and we are not prepared – shame on us!
The Colorado River District continues to study “water banking” through testing how falling and deficit irrigation can produce water savings that could be put in Lake Powell to bolster low reservoir levels. This would protect irrigated agriculture by learning if there could be an organized, voluntary and compensated way to use irrigation water to prevent Lake Powell levels from dropping to a point where agriculture would be forced to forebear water. Municipal operators are also eyed for sharing in what is known as demand management. If levels at Powell fall too far, electric power generation would be threatened or ceased. By addressing this risk, the program also protects the Upper Colorado Basin states’ ability to comply with obligations under the Colorado River Compact of 1922.

In 2017, the Grand Valley Water Users Association, operators of the Government-Highline Canal in the Grand Junction area, will recruit producers who agree to be compensated for under-irrigating crops (affecting yield) or not planting at all in order to generate water savings. While work on water banking moved forward, so did debate about the impacts of fallowing agriculture.

The conundrum is whether the creation of a water bank system to protect irrigated agriculture might actually accelerate losing western Colorado irrigated agriculture. While supporting the study, the Board of Directors and staff worried about the unintended consequences that could in fact hasten a fate the plan is actually trying to prevent.

In turn, that raised the question of what might happen as Colorado continues to grow and develop. The worry was that, absent another mechanism, the default would be “buy and dry” of a large amounts of West Slope agricultural land for its water supplies to be repurposed. The consequences of buy and dry to local and regional economies and communities, and to other uses of water – particularly environmental and recreational – are widely viewed as something to take great pains to avoid.


Water Banking Pilot Program Begins

The Government-Highline Canal

The concept of water banking for compact purposes emerged from a joint meeting with the Southwestern Water Conservation District through a discussion of the early 2000’s drought impacts to the river system and the fact that Colorado may be much closer to full use of its Colorado River supplies than previously thought.

Avoiding “Buy & Dry”

In that, the need to focus on what might happen as Colorado continues to grow and develop. The worry was that, absent another mechanism, the default would be “buy and dry” of a large amounts of West Slope agricultural land for its water supplies to be repurposed. The consequences of buy and dry to local and regional economies and communities, and to other uses of water – particularly environmental and recreational – are widely viewed as something to take great pains to avoid.

Colorado River Risk Study, ‘Contingency Planning’ Addresses Low Reservoir Levels

If a drought as severe as 2002-04 recur in the West with Lake Powell now about half full instead of almost full as it was in 2002, the reservoir could be drawn below power generation levels or even drained unless preventive water management policies are put in place.

That is the conclusion of Phase I of the Colorado River Risk Assessment Study, commissioned by the River District and the Southwestern Water Conservation District on behalf of the four West Slope Basin Roundtables, grassroots water planning organizations created by state legislation. Phase II of the study is planned for 2017 to test more hydrology, demand and management scenarios.

Colorado Water Plan Spurs Better Data for Future Planning

The study is the direct result of action called out in Colorado’s Water Plan and the need of the four West Slope Basin Roundtables to have better technical information to support discussions about possible water development and/or curtailment issues. A main concern is to protect current users of the Colorado River system while studying actions to address reservoir levels at Lake Powell — where water storage to protect the Upper Basin states has declined over that last 16 years.

Contingency Planning

Both the states of the Upper Division (Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and New Mexico) and the states of the Lower Division (Arizona, Nevada and California) are continuing to work on “contingency plans” to address the dramatic declines in Lake Powell and Lake Mead, which ended 2016 at about 50 percent full and 38 percent full, respectively. River District General Manager Eric Kuhn said that success of the Upper Basin plan is directly related to success of the Lower Basin plan.

Protective actions already being developed by the Upper Division states include moving water from the big Colorado River Storage Project reservoirs of Aspinall, Flaming Gorge and Navajo, augmentation such as cloud seeding and tamarisk removal and the even bigger challenge of demand management — the cutting back on water use so that more flows reach Lake Powell.

The Lower Basin’s contingency plan is addressing a “structural deficit” between current water uses and Lake Mead releases. The plan, if implemented, would reduce deliveries from Lake Mead by an additional 800,000 acre-feet if Lake Mead approaches elevation 1,070 feet (about 50 feet lower than today’s level). When this additional conservation is added to the 600,000 acre-foot reduction required by the 2007 Moab Guidelines, the total will be 1.2 million acre-feet, the size of the structural deficit. Contingency planning at the states’ level started at the behest of the Secretary of the Interior who urged actions be developed to address the low-in-flow levels.

For more info about Colorado River risk issues, please visit http://bit.ly/2aBLJFC.

Lake Powell’s gorgeous, stark landscape reveals the fact that overuse of the Colorado River and warming temperatures are conspiring to draw down lake levels. If Lake Powell levels continue to fall, which is a more likely scenario than could void power revenues that support reservoir operations and environmental programs.


2°F increase in warming in the Colorado River Basin reduces the available water supply by 5%-10% or about 750,000 acre-feet annually, according to the most current studies.*
Progress Continues on the Lower Gunnison Project

The Lower Gunnison Project (LGP) is a Colorado River water management project whose primary focus is to improve water quality and increase water quantity in rivers and streams. The project is also supported by several interest groups including the Gunnison Basin & Grand Valley Selenium Task Forces, the Salinity Control Forum and the related Selenium Management Programs being facilitated by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Colorado state funding.

**Collaborative Funding**

Funding for this $50 million collaborative project combines $8 million in directed funding from the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) along with more than $42 million of U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Colorado state funding. The LGP seeks, funds and implements projects through a broad partnership of local agricultural producers, irrigation districts, ditch companies, conservation and conservancy districts, environmental organizations and state and local governments.

**Benefits in Four Areas**

The Colorado River District is acting as an agent of the NRCS to directly manage up to $42 million of funding, under an “Agreement for Alternative Funding” for water resource, conservation compliance and critical habitat improvements. These groups promote the accelerated implementation of activities that reduce salinity and selenium concentrations, thus helping aquatic habitats for sensitive species and boosting soil health. Irrigation modernization and water efficiency improvement projects are critical techniques in sustaining irrigated agriculture in this era of limited water supply conditions and growing competition for water resources across the West. It is an effective defensive strategy because agricultural water can be a target for municipal uses.

Since the Lower Gunnison Project was awarded $8 million of directed funding in 2015, the river basin has been actively working to obtain environmental and cultural clearances and approvals and getting cooperation from local, state and federal entities, including non-governmental, non-profit and for-profit entities.

**OBJECTIVES of the Lower Gunnison Project**

1. Address water quality degradation caused by excessive salts in surface waters and groundwaters.
2. Decrease salinity and selenium loading to the Gunnison and Colorado Rivers; and maintaining the agricultural heritage and economic viability of the area.
3. Increase agricultural water-use efficiency and agricultural production. The partnership also includes about 30 other groups promoting the cooperative Selenium Management Plan; 4. Reduce selenium loading by expanding co-management on-farm irrigation practices, such as irrigation water conveyance; 5. Improve soil quality through cover crops, compost mulching, nutrient management and no-till or reduced-till management; 6. Encourage and directly support conservation planning, such as the enrollment of a significant number of irrigated acres in Conservation Activity Plans with a focus on soil health components; 7. Increase agricultural productivity and economics (e.g., decreased labor, fertilizer and pesticide and related input costs); and 8. Provide comprehensive environmental and compliance and critical habitat improvement (i.e., regulations related to Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act compliance for selenium). For more information on the Lower Gunnison Project, please visit: http://bit.ly/28PrW70.
West Slope Wins Transmountain Diversion Case at the Colorado Supreme Court

The use and storage of transmountain water rights in Colorado must adhere to the same laws applicable to in-basin water rights. The Colorado River District and its allies won this important point of law in a Colorado Supreme Court decision released in December 2016.

**Change of Water Right**
The case concerned the change of transmountain diversion water right from agricultural to municipal purposes. It involved the Busk-Ivanhoe Transmountain Diversion Project in the headwaters of the Fryingpan River in Pitkin County.

**No Adjudicated Water Right**
At issue was a 2014 water court ruling involving the City of Aspen’s one-half interest in the project. The Supreme Court held that the Division 2 Water Court erred when it determined that storage of West Slope water on the Front Range is an inherent component of a transmountain water right. The high court ruled that an adjudicated storage right is required just as it is for in-basin projects.

The Supreme Court further determined that the water court erred when it excluded 22 years of non-decreed municipal use in quantifying the lawful historical use of water rights that could be changed to municipal use.

**Multiple Interests Involved**
Entities representing western Colorado interests included the Colorado River District, Pitkin County, the Grand Valley Water Conserving District, the Basalt Water Conservancy District and Eagle County. The Colorado State Engineer’s Office also took part in the case to contest the consumptive use calculation issue.

The Colorado River District Board of Directors awarded financial assistance grants to eight projects that applied to the District’s 2016 Water Supply Grant Program.

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Awards are made on a co-financing basis with River District funding typically providing 25 percent of total project costs. Grant projects must meet one or more of these objectives:

1. Development of a new water supply;
2. Improvement of an existing water supply system;
3. Measures to improve instream water quality;
4. Water-use efficiency improvements;
5. Sediment reduction measures; and/or,
6. Implementation of improved and/or riparian management actions.

Grants were awarded to:

- Crab Creek Corporation’s Simpson No. 1 Dam Overflow Replacement Project in Rio Blanco County was awarded $30,000;
- Maybell Irrigation District’s Ring Project Improvement Project in Moffat County was awarded $49,000;
- Orchard Ranch Ditch Company’s Piping Repairs Project in Delta County was awarded $25,000;
- The Town of Cedaredge’s Doughty Irrigation System Improvements Project in Delta County was awarded $5,200;
- The Town of Rangely’s Raw Water Irrigation Project in Rio Blanco County was awarded $20,000;
- The Town of Delta’s Dam Outlet Replacement Project in Delta County was awarded $1,000;
- The Young Creek Reservoir Company’s Abutment Seepage Mitigation Project in Delta County was awarded $22,000.

Several grant applicants addressed the Board of Directors at the April Quarterly Board meeting when grants were announced, including Matt Ro-Heaney, Water Resources Manager with the City of Steamboat Springs, who wrote, “We can’t thank the River District enough for the funding and the smooth grant process that enabled the completion of the West Lincoln Park Raw Water Irrigation Project. It’s encouraging to work with a grant program that is accessible to small municipalities and ranchers alike without the complexities associated with other state and federal grant programs. A smooth process!”

For additional information on the River District, its Grant Program and the 2016 Water Supply Grant Program, please visit www.coloradoriverdistrict.org/grant-program.
Conflict between efforts to restore four federally listed endagered fish in the Yampa River and popular game fishing in Elkhead Reservoir near Craig, Colorado, was avoided in 2016 by installation of a $1.3 million spillway barrier net. The net is designed to keep game fish such as smallmouth bass from escaping and entering the Yampa River, where they could impact sensitive species. The Colorado River District is one of the owners of the Elkhead Reservoir and manages its operations. It took the lead in resolving the conflict among fish priorities.

The net advanced efforts from 2006 when outfit workers were installed during construction to eradicate the problem. The remaining challenge was to keep the barrier in place 24/7 to keep non-native species from passing. The non-native barrier net affords fishery managers a staged approach to convert the river’s fishery to a mix of species still popular with the public yet less threatening to the listed species. Installing the spillway barrier net instead affects fishery managers a staged approach to convert the river’s fishery to a mix of species still popular with the public yet less threatening to the listed species.

The barrier net was critical to the success of the Recovery Program, which has been willing and able to identify the barrier net as a more cost-effective option than other methods. The net should last 10 to 30 years, depending on the conditions and will be replaced if it does not do its job well.

Cooperative Effort

“Projects like these require the cooperation and coordination of multiple partners,” said Kevin McAbee, non-native fish coordinator at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “We are happy to take on the non-native problem, we were willing to compromise, because we heard the community.”

The Elkhead Reservoir spillway barrier net is an important component of the Recovery Program, directly benefiting the native fish species in the Yampa River, including the razorback sucker, native cutthroat trout and the Yampa sucker.

The Barrier Net Project Protects Endangered Fish below Elkhead Reservoir

Installation of the fish net barrier.
Water Wranglers

This history of the Colorado River District is equivalent to the history of water in the West. Author George Sibley’s book “Water Wranglers” is an essential read for citizens of the West who want to learn about our water history. It is still in print and available to the public. Call us at 970-945-8522.

School Water Festivals

One part of our outreach efforts for children is our coordination and participation in water festivals within our District. The festivals educate about the value and fragility of our limited water resources through fun games and hands-on activities.

ColoradoRiverDistrict.org

Learn about and engage in Colorado’s water future by exploring our website. Resources include detailed current information on water policy, agreements, research, conservation and planning issues and about the history, geographical make-up, financing, governance and future of the Colorado River Basin. We have a rich library of videos that delve into all of these topics.

H2O Outdoors

Our program brings high school students to the heart of the Rocky Mountains for a three-day educational program on water management. Students are assigned “stakeholder roles” to reflect those in real-life water management. A “Town Hall” meeting marks the final event in which students utilize knowledge gained from the program to engage in discussions about managing and balancing important water issues.

State of the River meetings

Annually, the River District holds seven public meetings around the District during the runoff season in May and early June. These meetings review the current water year relative to snowpack, spring snowmelt and reservoir operations. In addition, each meeting includes presentations and discussions on critical water issues. For more info visit: www.ColoradoRiverDistrict.org/state-of-the-river-meetings

Annual Water Seminar

The Colorado River District held its fourteenth Annual Water Seminar on May 15, 2017. The seminar themes included the public’s role in historic basin water conflict, the Colorado River, and water justice. Senator Tom Udall explained current construction efforts by the Upper Colorado River Regional Water Conservation Project to help adapt to the structural deficit in the Colorado River Basin. UCD’s 2017 seminar is set for Sept. 15 in Grand Junction.

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Jeff Lukas
runoff, said Jeff Lucas of the Boulder-based Colorado Water Conservation District. “It’s tempting for some people in the Lower Basin to assume that the critical declines in Lake Mead are the result of the droughts,” she said. “But the real problem is the simple fact that the Lower Basin uses 1.2 million acre-feet more water than is delivered.” This is called the structural deficit.

Arizona and other Lower Basin states have started yielding to the “many hard and sobering realities” of declining levels and southern Arizona and other Lower Basin states have started yielding to the “many hard and sobering realities” of declining levels and the impacts of the structural deficit. “This is called the structural deficit.

From the 1922 Colorado River Compact assumed average flows of 18 million acre-feet per year. But since 2005, despite more-or-less average precipitation, flows in the river have averaged 12.7 million acre-feet. What if these lower flows continue, such as in arid years? Data indicate they did between 1120-1170 A.D.?”

Eric Kuhn, General Manager of the Colorado River District, said Upper Basin states have a different challenge than Lower Basin states. What are the impacts of these reductions on Upper Basin states? “We’re not hurt.”

Risk of impacts to current water users is partly a function of hydrology, and we have such a law. And western water laws discourage efficiency and use or priority administration. “Very rarely do I see any attention to the four pillars of our rule of law, and I just don’t buy that farmers don’t understand this,” he said.

Hobbs asserted that the Colorado Doctrine and other forms of prior appropriation are premised on the fact that water is a scarce commodity in the West. “You have to have a law that tracks the hydrology, and we have such a law. And it’s because our predecessors gave us to from practical experience. This was not invented by law professors or the federal government. These laws grew from the ground up. Farmers and ranchers know is a fundamental untruth.” Farmers and ranchers also continue to over-water crops, he noted, in the belief that doing so is necessary to protect the ranch’s full allotment of water.

Farmers and ranchers should have better opportunities to benefit from saving water, said Lodwick, with benefits to their bank accounts or land values. See video or review transcripts and see video or review transcripts of all Annual Water Seminar speakers here: http://www.coloradoriverdistrict.org/annual-seminars/annual-water-seminar-bringing-water-education-to-the-public
by limiting its applicability to Water Divisions to accommodate the River District’s concerns. The bill saw success but only after sponsors agreed on compromise language acceptable to the River District’s subdistrict bill. After lengthy negotiating sessions to develop a potential mitigation tool for new projects, Senator Sonnenberg’s (R-Sterling) four year-long crusade to make a statement on federal water conservation legislation reached its conclusion at the state Capitol to ensure the rights and interests of the District’s western Colorado at the state Capitol to represent the district’s priority projects. The Colorado River District commits considerable time and resources to represent the District’s subdistrict bill. SB 145 created a simplified, alternative mechanism for creation of subdistricts within the Colorado River District. At least two Basin Roundtables have already identified SB 145 as a possible measure of achieving one or more of their basin’s priority projects. The Colorado River System Conservation Program and related Lower Basin water and wastewater infrastructure funding. As an estimated $125 million in refund claims are submitted, the tax liability against non-consumptive uses and values. In late April, the Colorado Supreme Court reversed lower court rulings denying British Petroleum (BP) certain dedications in seawater tax liability. This ruling resulted in mandatory refunds to BP and allowed as much as an estimated $51 million in refund claims to other oil and gas companies operating in Colorado over the past several years. To date, the Arizona Water Quality Board (AZWQ) has not adopted a protocol for any state or federal water-related legislation and administration (regulatory) proposals for potential benefits and impact to the District and western Colorado water users. Typically, the District focuses on federal-level interest on issues that uniquely or disproportionately affect western Colorado. The 2016 Colorado General Assembly session will likely be most remembered as a Director of Project Permitting in his office. The House passed the Bolts Ditch bill that the Town of Minturn requires to rehabilitate the Bolts Lake as a municipal water supply, and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Com- mittee has committed to this bill’s reintro- duction in the 2017 legislature. The federal government committed to spending an additional $360 million through 2018 to prepare the project developers for the cost of their activities. The Obama administration final- ized requirements setting a higher bar for petitions to protect newly listed species or their habitats under the Endangered Species Act. The rule now also requires a long-term permit to thrive for “fairness,” including requirements for inclusion of any information the petitioner is aware of that contradicts claims in the petition. 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The rule now also requires a long-term permit to thrive for “fairness,” including requirements for inclusion of any information the petitioner is aware of that contradicts claims in the petition. The House passed the Bolts Ditch bill that the Tower of Molismo requires to rehabilitate Bolts Lake as a municipal water supply, and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Com-
The Colorado River District is governed by a 15-member Board of Directors. Each member is appointed to a three-year term by the respective County Commissioners in each of the District’s 15 counties. Each year a third of the Board seats are up for appointment. All members, however, resign and new members are selected at the annual convention held in January. Policies, resolutions, budgets and major actions of the Colorado River District are approved by the Board. The Board meets in regular session quarterly, in the months of January, April, July and October. Special meetings are called as needed. To stay up to date on Board meetings, visit the District’s website at www.ColoradoRiverDistrict.org.

To contact a Board member e-mail edinfo@crwcd.org or call 970-945-8522.

Colorado River District 2016 Board of Directors

John Ely
Pitkin County

William S. “Bill” Trampe
Gunnison County

Alden Vanden Brink
Rio Blanco County

Tom Alvey 2016 Vice President
Delta County 2017 President

Mike Ritschard
Grand County

Gary Martinez
Summit County

Rebie Hazard
Saguache County

Stan Whinnery
Hinsdale County

David Merritt 2017 Vice President
Garfield County

Martha Whitmore
Ouray County

Tom Gray
Moffat County

Marc Catlin
Montrose County

John Stavney 2016 President
Eagle County

John Justman
Mesa County

Doug Monger
Routt County

Survey Finds Consistent Public Support for Protecting the Colorado River

Every three years, the Colorado River District conducts a scientific survey of its constituents in the 15 western Colorado counties that comprise the District. The reason is to stay abreast and to learn more about the public’s concerns and understanding of Colorado River issues and of the District itself.

A professional pollster, Lori Weigel of Public Opinion Strategies, contacted 500 constituents in June 2016. As with the last effort in 2013, a vast majority identified the Colorado River as critical to Colorado's quality of life, as important to the West Slope economy, as a state treasure, in need of greater protection and as important to them personally.

Respondents, in thinking about tax dollars, emphasized the importance of fighting to keep water for use on the West Slope, protecting agricultural water supplies and protecting fish and wildlife habitat, among other priorities concerning the Colorado River and its tributaries.


82% of the districts residents believe it is vital to protect Colorado's agricultural heritage by ensuring adequate water supplies for farmers.
The Colorado River Basin and its headwaters within the Colorado River District have demands on it that are greater than any other river in North America. Today it supplies water to nearly 40 million people. Its finite water supply and the pressing demands of increasing population and a changing climate are bringing the river to a critical point where conservation, cooperation and coordinated planning are essential for the health of the river and the people that depend on it. The Colorado River District is dedicated to protecting those waters in its district and in the state as a whole using conservation, better efficiency, storage, careful planning and cooperation throughout the Colorado River Basin system.