



COLORADO RIVER DISTRICT

PROTECTING WESTERN COLORADO WATER SINCE 1937

MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS, CRWCD AND INFORMATION AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE

FROM: ALESHA FREDERICK, ZANE KESSLER AND JIM POKRANDT

SUBJECT: EXTERNAL AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES FOR 2020

DATE: DECEMBER 31, 2019

ACTIONS: *The Information and Outreach Committee will convene on Tuesday January 21, 2019 at 4:30pm to discuss the 2020 work plan. This memo will be the basis for the Committee's discussion.*

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE(S):

1.E. & 1.F. Outreach and Advocacy

2.A. Outreach in All Basins

In 2019 the External Affairs team worked diligently to execute a rebranding of the Colorado River District. Our rebranding efforts promoted and maintained the values our constituents have come to associate with the River District while adding a fresh look that has both attracted a new audience and re-engaged our existing audiences.

Along with rebranding efforts, the External Affairs team – in partnership with other River District staff – continued to be actively involved in on-the-ground information and outreach activities that increased community engagement and further established the River District as the leading voice on West Slope water issues.

With the financial challenges facing the River District, it is more important than ever that we promote public understanding of important West Slope water issues while branding the River District's mission and services to our constituents. The External Affairs team has worked strategically to make the connection between the River District name, our brand and the work we do. In 2020, continuing these efforts is critical in our efforts to solidify the River District as a recognized and trusted water leader. Continuing to increase public understanding of the role the District plays in navigating West Slope water issues is our top priority.

Below is an overview of the River District's proposed information and outreach plan for 2020. We welcome the Board's input.

Messaging

Over the past 15 years, the District has done a significant amount of research regarding public opinion and brand recognition of the District. We consistently have found that when people are told what the River District does, they are supportive, but they do not often connect the work we do with our name. To help make this connection, the External Affairs team has determined that all communications, advertising materials, website and social media updates coming from the District will tout our brand and the key elements of our mission to protect and represent the West Slope's water interests. Our communications will have a consistent message that conveys what our organization does, what it offers and/or why we are needed by our constituents for the protection of West Slope water. The following six key pillars will be the basis of the External Affairs team messaging in 2020:

1. The Colorado River District works to protect West Slope water and keep it on the West Slope.
2. The Colorado River District works to ensure western Colorado communities have safe and reliable drinking water supplies.
3. The Colorado River District works to protect West Slope water for West Slope farmers and ranchers in order to sustain local food production.
4. The Colorado River District works to protect fish and wildlife by maintaining river levels and water quality.
5. The Colorado River District works to mitigate increasingly unpredictable water supplies and droughts.
6. The Colorado River District works to help farmers and ranchers modernize irrigation systems to conserve river water.

A detailed narrative of the six pillars is attached.

Educational Programs/Activities

1. ***River District Webinars*** – Online educational platforms continue to be a cost-effective opportunity for engaging constituents – especially for those that are not able to attend events in person. The External Affairs team is proposing to host 3-4 webinars in 2020. Our first Webinar has been scheduled for **February 19 at 12 noon** and it will be a continuation of our “Know Your Snow” series. We will explore topics for future webinars to be held in the months of May, August and November.
2. ***State of the River Workshops*** – This year the External Affairs team will host 13 State of the River Workshops. These public meetings will be held from February through June. The workshops are an opportunity for us to collaborate with local partners on key areas such as organizing, costs and publicity. The workshops are designed to address snowpack/runoff conditions within specific communities. These events are primarily used to highlight the work of the River District and other topical water issues. Attendance is expected to range from 50 to 200 for each, depending on the location. There is a potential for some meetings to be filmed by local cable TV stations that are then repeatedly aired on

local Public, Education and Government channels. 2020 State of the River meetings will be held in the following locations:

- a. Gunnison
 - b. Montrose
 - c. Ouray
 - d. Delta
 - e. Mesa
 - f. Rio Blanco
 - g. Craig – March 31
 - h. Steamboat – April 1
 - i. Rifle
 - j. Carbondale
 - k. Eagle
 - l. Summit
 - m. Grand
3. ***Annual Water Seminar*** – Our signature event continues to grow and expand. In 2019 we broke another record with over 325 registrants. The 2020 seminar will be held on Friday, September 11 at Two Rivers Convention Center in Grand Junction, Colorado. The seminar will be promoted using a combination of print, email, radio and online advertisements. We will also plan to have the program professionally recorded to be included on our YouTube Channel and livestreamed via our Facebook page.
4. ***Live Audio of Board Meetings*** – The Administrative Staff continues to successfully broadcast the audio of our Board meetings live, while also archiving them on our website for continual access to the public.
5. ***Annual Report*** – The annual feature will be reintroduced at the April Board meeting. It will be a more streamlined format that enhances our increased digital presence and enables us to distribute it in new and innovative ways to a broader audience.

Outreach Programs/Activities

1. ***River District Water News*** – In the past the District has emailed a small group of recipients news articles related to water. The External Affairs team is working to formalize this service with a water newsletter. The newsletter will be a branded newsletter that will provide up-to-date information on water news in western Colorado and beyond in one stop. This will be a no-fee subscription-based service that anyone can receive.
2. ***Newsletters*** – The External Affairs team will send 8 newsletters to subscribed constituents throughout the year. These newsletters are emailed broadly to the public, the press and local governments before and after each quarterly Board meeting. This is an all-electronic endeavor, but the reports are designed for easy printing for hard-copy distribution. News

summaries are also being distributed in the form of online articles, or original content, via social media and on our website.

3. **Website/Social Media** – We maintain a robust website that gives a good window into our operations and issues. Throughout 2020 the website will be updated and edited to be more aligned with the River District’s branding aesthetic and messaging. The River District also maintains a suite of growing social media platforms that are consistently used to promote visibility in the communities we serve, and to disseminate targeted information to constituents. We have created a consistent posting schedule for our social media platforms that will continue to build upon and expand our social media outreach in 2020.
4. **Radio Advertising** – Promoting on radio stations within our District continues to be a cost-effective way to deliver a consistent message to a very broad audience. In 2020, River District messages will increase in frequency across airways and remain consistent throughout the year. We will use short 30 second segments during specific times of the day to effectively reach broad cross sections of our constituents.
5. **Speakers Bureau** – A variety of staff members are recruited by civic groups and other organizations to address current water issues. We will continue to speak at these events using the consistent messaging points described above.
6. **Press Relations** – The River District continues to be a go-to place for reporters to find background, context and quotes for increasing coverage of western water issues. We will continue to foster these relationships in 2020 by setting editorial meetings with our major media partners.
7. **Director Briefings** – As individual director’s desire and request, staff is available to assist in any briefings or public meetings you may have in your county.
8. **Elected Official Briefings/Updates** – In the coming year, it is imperative that we work to inform and advise legislators and elected officials in the District on water issues and policy matters. The External Affairs team has developed a plan for increased engagement with county commissioners and local elected officials on the West Slope in 2020, as well as with legislators and key officials under the gold dome. Engagement in this area will include in-person briefings as well as increased written correspondence with elected officials.

Six pillars draft

January 7, 2020

Why was the Colorado River District created? To fight to keep water on the West Slope. It's that simple. Water security for Western Colorado.

The Colorado River is the lifeblood of Western Colorado. When we talk about the Colorado River, we mean the whole watershed: the Yampa, the White, the Gunnison, the Uncompahgre, the mainstem of the Colorado and all the streams and creeks that flow into them.

We were founded on an intra-state rivalry. The Front Range needed water supplies, while the West Slope wanted to protect its way of life and the water that sustains it. Colorado water rights law does not recognize the Continental Divide as a water barrier. That means that water providers can legally move water from the West Slope to the East Slope, if they can attain water rights and build the infrastructure needed to do so. The Colorado River District was formed in 1937 to represent the West Slope in contesting and negotiating west-to-east water projects. Western Colorado's own water needs and economy were at stake — and continue to be so. More than 80 years later, we're committed to the same cause: Keeping West Slope Water on the West Slope.

Colorado employs a system called prior appropriation to divvy up water in the state. The oldest water rights, called senior water rights, have priority over the younger, junior water rights. When there is not enough water to fulfill all the water rights on a stream, those with senior rights can "call" for junior rights holders to stop using water until those senior water rights are satisfied.

Colorado has legal obligations on the river beyond its borders. Under the Colorado River Compact of 1922, Colorado and its Upper Basin neighbors (Utah, Wyoming and New Mexico) are required to provide a certain amount of water to states downstream (Arizona, California and Nevada). Decreasing flows put Colorado's ability to meet its compact obligations at risk. This could result in a compact call, in which some water users would be required to curtail or stop using water until downstream needs are met.

The Colorado River District is charged by its founding legislation to protect Colorado's share of the Colorado River. The state's share is set out in a complex series of interstate compacts, Supreme Court cases and multi-state agreements. Since 1937, the Colorado River District has provided critical legal and engineering leadership to the entire Colorado River basin. We currently have multiple staff members engaged as key advisers to various federal, regional and state efforts. We have provided key engineering and river flow modeling data to the State of Colorado and its partners in the Upper Basin and we are constantly engaged in making sure Colorado's entitlement under the law is protected.

Fighting to keep water on the West Slope

The Colorado River District is Western Colorado's watchdog. A fast-growing state, especially the Front Range, is pressuring the Colorado River at a time when warmer temperatures reduce flows and increase demand, as well. We're taking on the legal fight to keep water flowing westward.

Here's how we do it:

We maintain a presence and voice at the state Capitol. In 1933, West Slope leaders discovered through newspaper headlines that a west-to-east water project (the Colorado-Big Thompson Project) was

proposed in the legislature. Lesson learned. Monitoring and influencing state governmental actions is vital to protect and improve Western Colorado's water conditions.

Our legal department monitors water rights court filings and takes action if required. Our attorneys work side by side with our engineers and governmental affairs team to make sure we're protecting Western Colorado water.

The best defense of Western Colorado water is an educated citizenry, so we work to provide accurate, timely information to the public via in-person and online outreach. Our website, numerous public events, newsletters and social media posts are designed to engage Western Colorado citizens in how important water is to the region. We bring people together to protect West Slope water.

Our engineering department operates water supply projects to benefit West Slope water users. We own two reservoirs and we have secured significant water supplies in other reservoirs. We assist water users with expertise and act as a catalyst to bring significant federal and state funding to improve our West Slope irrigation projects.

Protecting drinking water supplies for Western Colorado Communities by fighting to keep water on the West Slope

Everything we do to protect Western Colorado water and to keep water flowing in its natural direction from east to west is a protection of drinking water. Many West Slope communities draw drinking water supplies directly from the Colorado River system. More water flowing in the rivers where our water treatment plants are located results in better, more affordable water for public consumption. When flows are diminished, treatment becomes more complex and more expensive, diminishing drinking water quality.

We also help to protect drinking water by operating and storing water in reservoirs. In the complex world of water rights, water providers need water kept in storage to protect their ability to divert and treat water should their junior water rights be curtailed by senior water rights. Stored water allows us to release water when flows fall or water rights are curtailed, ensuring uninterrupted supplies.

Fighting to keep water on the West Slope protects farmers and ranchers and their local food production

Fighting to keep water on the West Slope protects farmers and ranchers who are the very backbone of Western Colorado. The senior water rights owned by farmers and ranchers are integral to their business, but also benefit the recreational and environmental values treasured by folks in Western Colorado. Senior water rights help to control and maintain the east-to-west natural flow of the river.

Many West Slope ranchers and farmers hold water rights senior to the Colorado River Compact of 1922, which under the compact, cannot be curtailed during a call. But this makes producers vulnerable to economic and political pressure to move that water out of irrigated agriculture. Those senior rights also depend on water quality so that the cleanest water possible is applied to irrigation. Water quality depends on sufficient flows of clean water from the high country. This is why we watchdog projects that would divert more flows to the Front Range.

Agriculture also depends on water storage. That's why over time we advocated and negotiated for Green Mountain Reservoir, the most important reservoir on the mainstem of the Colorado River, and Ruedi Reservoir on the Fryingpan River. That's why we filed for the water rights that became Blue Mesa Reservoir on the Gunnison River, the largest storage in Western Colorado. That's why we built Wolford Mountain Reservoir near the headwaters of the Colorado and enlarged Elkhead Reservoir in the Yampa Basin.

Today, we are leading an examination of water demand management to see if voluntary, compensated savings of ag water can be a tool to forestall or prevent a forced, uncompensated curtailment under the Colorado River Compact. A curtailment is an existential threat to agriculture and all Western Colorado economic and environmental values. Irrigated lands provide wildlife habitat. Working landscapes provide vistas for tourists and residents alike and define Western Colorado as much as our forests and deserts. Protecting water for agriculture protects all Western Colorado water and the regional economy.

Protecting fish and wildlife by protection river levels and water quality

Keeping water on the West Slope is a direct protection of fish and wildlife. Water quantity has a direct bearing on water quality in Western Colorado — whether it's for fish and wildlife or humans.

The Colorado River District directs water stored in reservoirs to be released during critical times for the benefit of the environment. In doing so, the River District is protecting our recreational fishing and boating economy and the endangered native fish in the Colorado River, often all at the same time.

The Colorado Constitution gives Front Range water users the right to divert Colorado River water to the east side of the Continental Divide. The constitution, however, doesn't address the obligation of transbasin water users to respect or protect the environment of the Colorado River watershed. The Colorado River District and our West Slope partners have negotiated successful legal agreements to mitigate the impact of reduced streamflow from transbasin diversions. Since its inception in 1937, the Colorado River District has been the pioneering and leading voice for the protection of the flows in the Colorado River. The River District led efforts to establish compensatory storage, which requires Front Range diverters to provide water in West Slope reservoirs and pay to develop that storage in those reservoirs, including the River District's Wolford Mountain Reservoir.

These reservoirs also release water into our streams at critical times of the year, when low flow and warm water temperatures threaten wildlife habitat. Agreements with Front Range water users, the federal government and other partners enable us to protect the environment in hot, dry years like 2018. Releases of River District water stored in reservoirs bolstered river flows, maintained a healthy water temperature for habitat and protected fish populations in the Yampa, the Colorado and the Fryingpan rivers. Given the science-based predictions of increasing variable but rising temperatures, operations like this will become more critical in the future.

The River District is a central player in the Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery Program. Four species of prehistoric fish in the Upper Colorado River basin are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act: the humpback chub, bonytail, Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Colorado River District joined a collaborative effort to recover the fish with partners including water users on both sides of the Divide, state and federal officials. One of the tools to boost populations of these fish is reservoir releases to bolster flows at peak runoff, and in drier times

during the summer. The Colorado River District owns and operates two reservoirs that were built (Wolford Mountain) or enlarged (Elkhead) to store water for endangered fish recovery. The River District also helped secure flows for the fish out of Ruedi, Blue Mesa and Granby reservoirs. These reservoirs help fish in the Colorado, Yampa and Gunnison Rivers. The District also works with partners to release water to help cold-water fish in times when low flows and high water temperatures threaten their health.

Because Western Colorado once was a sea bottom, its soils contain salts and selenium. When excessive quantities of these minerals move into streams and rivers, they can have adverse effects on fish and wildlife and crop irrigation downstream. Programs addressing both minerals have also assisted water users in modernizing irrigation practices, using pipes in place of open canals and using more efficient irrigation techniques. The Colorado River District plays a role in reducing this pollution by participating in the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program and in the Gunnison Basin and Grand Valley Selenium Task Forces.

Protecting West Slope water supplies in times of increasing unpredictability and rising temperatures.

The research is clear. Western Colorado is experiencing warmer temperatures in both winter and summer. This rise in temperatures is causing lower flows in the river and higher demands for water use, which leaves less water available in rivers. The Colorado and its tributaries are already overallocated, with science indicating that there will be even less water flowing in our rivers. In the future, we can count on increased pressure and competing demands on the river.

In times of change, accurate information is essential to good water-use planning. At the Colorado River District, we work hard to make sense of all the science and to work to create reliable, accurate research and data where we see gaps. We work hard to interpret that research to help our agricultural, industrial, recreational and municipal water users understand the risks facing them. Knowing these risks, we can better work together to create plans to mitigate the risks posed by these changes. By integrating sound science with proper planning, we believe that all of Colorado, especially Western Colorado, will benefit by more informed policy and leadership. We represent Colorado's interests in negotiating with other Colorado River Basin states to ensure Colorado's share of the river is protected in an uncertain future.

Planning for a hotter future is paramount to protecting Western Colorado. In 2010, the Colorado River District led an effort to study the option of water banking, a way to conserve water and save it in Lake Powell to protect water users from compact curtailment. This effort has encouraged research related to how reduced irrigation can affect crops and ag producers. The Colorado River District has led this effort through a collaborative group called the Water Bank Work Group, which is now engaged in the science of economics: trying to determine what reduced irrigation and crop production could mean for farmers and the Main Street businesses the agricultural economy supports.

The River District has been leading efforts on the West Slope to develop better data showing where we consume water and how much various types of use consume. This work will develop a better understanding of the risk water users may face if we face curtailment under a Compact Call. The Colorado River District led the Colorado River Risk Study through three phases (so far) to generate essential research to inform West Slope water users and community leaders as we plan for the challenge of a Compact Call.

Protecting West Slope water by helping farmers and ranchers modernize irrigation systems

Agriculture is the biggest water user in Western Colorado — and all of Colorado. Sustaining productive agriculture in Western Colorado is one of the Colorado River District's top priorities. That's because irrigated agriculture is central to the region's economy, culture and local food production. An ample water supply keeps costs down for farmers and ranchers, and provides consumers with affordable, local wool, fruit, gain, beef and more. Helping keep our farmers and ranchers sustain their business also provides wildlife habitat. Working farms and ranches provide many of Colorado's most beautiful landscapes, and in higher elevations of our watersheds, water for crops trickles through the soil as return flows, boosting river flows later into the summer and fall.

Agriculture holds another key to Western Colorado's well-being. Most of its water rights are senior, put on the books prior to 1922, which under the compact and the prior appropriation water rights system, puts them out of reach of a compact curtailment. That also makes them a target for conversion to municipal use. Keeping West Slope senior agricultural rights in use helps keep water flowing westward in our rivers, because it means less water is available for junior, Front Range uses.

For many reasons, agricultural water use is under pressure. One way to sustain agriculture is to work with willing producers on ways to modernize their irrigation systems and make best use of their water. Some techniques conserve water. Others use water more efficiently.