Protecting West Slope water in times of uncertainty

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Colorado River District
The Colorado River District was formed in 1937 to protect West Slope water users.
We work to protect West Slope water and keep your water on the West Slope.
Denver Needs Water From Western Slope

(By The Associated Press)

Denver, March 31—The Colorado River commission this afternoon heard its first testimony regarding plans for trans-mountain diversion of the waters of the Colorado river. W. F. R. Mills, a member of the Denver board of water commissioners, told the commissioners diversions must be undertaken if the city of Denver is to obtain a supply of water for domestic consumption if its growing population.

Mr. Mills and other witnesses declared 250,000 acre feet of water should be diverted from the western slope of Colorado to Denver thru irrigation tunnels built at altitudes of approximately 10,000 feet in the Rocky mountains.

Diversions of this amount of water, Mr. Mills declared, would not injure the river in its descent into the lower basin states.

Answering a query from Frank C. Emmerson, commissioner of Wyoming, Mr. Mills declared any pact between the states should provide for trans-mountain diversion to guarantee Denver water for all time for domestic consumption. Other city engineering officials agreed with Mr. Mills.

In Denver, deputy state engineer of Colorado opened the technical case of the State of Colorado with a statement today declaring the state is entitled to unrestricted use of the

Take Western Slope Water Under Range

Plans for a $2,250,000 transmountain water diversion project, to provide water for Golden, Arvada, Edgewater, the state rifle range and irrigation districts west of Denver, has been announced by a committee headed by A. D. Quintana.

The plan was originally made an expenditure of $1,000,000 after investigation, the committee decided to more than double the capacity and the investment. A organization to be known as the Edgemont Metropolitan Water association is to be formed and it will seek funds from the construction Finance corporation.

The plans call for three tunnels under Jones peak, eight west of Empire, to divert water to the Williams fork into either creek or Ralston creek. A tunnel between South fork and Pike fork also is included in the plan.

EAST SLOPE WANTS COLO. RIVER WATER

Initial steps toward an agreement between Eastern and Western slope interests for transmountain diversion of water into northern Colorado from the Colorado river watershed were taken at a conference in Grand Junction last Friday.

Representatives were present from Weld, Larimer, Logan, Morgan and Sedgwick counties. The Western slope was represented by the protective association directors from the counties on the Colorado river watershed. Those officers are: Simon Smith, Mesa; B. F. Long, Eagle; Frank Delaney, Garfield; Milton R. Welch, Delta; C. J. Moynihan, Montrose; E. M. Nourse, Gunnison; W. B. Burkett, Ouray; C. G. Wag-
To lead in the protection, conservation, use, and development of the water resources of the Colorado River basin.
Keeping water flowing to farms and ranches

Securing legal protections to keep water on the West Slope

Maintaining healthy rivers

Ensuring adequate drinking water supplies
Annual lower basin overuse:
1.1 to 1.3 million-acre feet
Average annual average precipitation in Colorado

Graphic and data from the Colorado Climate Center
Three parts of ‘water supply equation’ in River District

1. Snow accumulation, melt, runoff (~80%)
2. “Monsoonal” input (~10%)
3. Groundwater input and baseflow (~10%)
Temperature data generated by NOAA
Temperature graphic courtesy the Washington Post
Temperature data generated by NOAA

Temperature graphic courtesy the Washington Post
For every 1-degree Fahrenheit rise in temperature, streamflow is reduced between 3% to 5.2%.

Data:
How Warming Drives Reductions in Streamflow Berghuijs et al. (2014), Barnhart et al. (2016), Deems et al. (2013)
Colorado River flow dwindles as warming-driven loss of reflective snow energizes evaporation (P. C. D. Milly, K. A. Dunne, Science 2020)
Upper Colorado River conditions under projected warming

Generalized conditions for illustrative purposes only.
• More fall and spring precipitation falling as rain instead of snow

• More snowpack lost to sublimation

• Earlier snowmelt

• A longer growing season
Financial challenges

Key issues:

• Declining tax revenue from the energy industry

• Revenue ratcheting down due to the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights

• The Gallagher Amendment’s reduction in assessment rates

• Expense trends: District has cut four full time employees and reduced expenses 15%
On July 21, the Colorado River District’s Board of Directors adopted a resolution to ask voters in November to support a property tax increase to 0.5 mills.
The resolution included adoption of a Fiscal Implementation Plan that spells out how the added money would be invested across every county within the district. The District will not utilize the new revenue to create additional staff positions.