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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 to the basin of origin. 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. In any examination of potential new transmountain diversion projects, the River District, at a minimum, will insist on adherence to the seven principles enumerated in the “IBCC Conceptual Framework” as described in Colorado’s Water Plan, 2015.

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 wherever allowed by law.

Transmountain diversion projects seeking re-operations that result in an 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:

Most of the 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. On average, a total of roughly 500,000 acre feet of Colorado River Basin water is transmountain diverted annually in Colorado.

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

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 House Bill 05-1177 process that resulted in the 2015 Colorado's Water Plan, especially the basin-by-basin review and identification of both consumptive and non-consumptive water needs and potential supply alternatives. Additionally, the District participated with the Interbasin Compact Committee (IBCC) formed by HB 1177 that developed the consensus criteria that any new transmountain diversion proposal should follow to ensure adequate local input, protection of local authorities, acceptance of hydrologic risk by the proponent, and full mitigation. These criteria are formalized as the "IBCC Conceptual Framework" for new water project development in Colorado's Water Plan, 2015.

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.