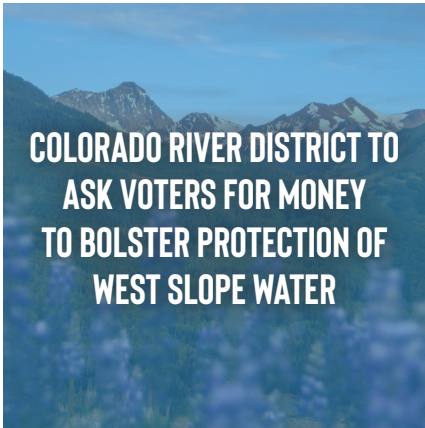




# August 2020 NEWSLETTER

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UPCOMING EVENTS

# COLORADO RIVER DISTRICT TO ASK VOTERS FOR MONEY TO BOLSTER PROTECTION OF WEST SLOPE WATER

## BOARD AUTHORIZES NOV. 3 BALLOT QUESTION TO INCREASE MILL LEVY BY \$1.90 PER YEAR PER ASSESSED \$100,000 OF RESIDENTIAL VALUE

**T**he Colorado River District's board of directors adopted a resolution Tuesday, July 21, 2020, to ask voters in November to support a property tax increase to protect water security in Western Colorado while funding projects to improve water use and healthy streams.

River District General Manager Andy Mueller said the board's resolution asks for taxpayer support for the River District work directed at:

- Fighting to keep water on the West Slope;
- Protecting adequate water supplies for West Slope farmers and ranchers;
- Protecting sustainable drinking water supplies for West Slope communities; and
- Protecting fish, wildlife, and recreation by maintaining river levels and water quality.

The resolution also approves a Fiscal Implementation Plan that spells out how the added money would be invested across the district. Included in the plan is an explicit direction that the "district is committed to coordinating and consulting local elected officials in any and all relevant counties prior to committing funds to any specific project or activity pursued by the district."

If voters agree, the median residential property tax increase in the district's 15-county region would be \$7.03 per year. The question will go on the Nov. 3, 2020, ballot in Grand, Summit, Eagle, Pitkin, Garfield, Routt, Moffat, Rio Blanco, Mesa, Delta, Ouray, Gunnison, and parts of Montrose, Saguache and Hinsdale counties.

The resolution references the mission of the Colorado River Water Conservation District to lead in the protection, conservation, use and development of the water resources of the Colorado River Basin for the welfare of the District and to safeguard for Colorado all waters of the Colorado River to which the state is entitled.

According to the resolution, in these increasingly contentious times of long-term drought and external pressure on water, Western Colorado needs "a strong and effective advocate." Meanwhile the district budget is "projected to continue to be negatively impacted due to declining revenues from the energy sector, the impacts of the Gallagher Amendment and the revenue limitations of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (known commonly as TABOR).

According to the Fiscal Implementation Plan, the new mill levy would raise about \$4.9 million more annually for the River District throughout its 15-county boundaries. About \$4.2 million would be dedicated to partnership projects across the District in one or more of the following five categories laid out in the plan: productive agriculture, infrastructure, healthy rivers, watershed health and water quality, conservation and efficiency. The rest would address budgetary reductions caused by the Gallagher and TABOR amendments. No new staff positions would be created with the new funds. The full Resolution and Fiscal Implementation Plan adopted July 21, 2020 can be [read here](#).

## CONGRESS PERMANENTLY FUNDS THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

In his Federal Legislative update, Zane Kessler, Director of Government Affairs for the Colorado River District, highlighted the passage of S. 3422, the Great American Outdoors Act.

S. 3422 was introduced by Senator Cory Gardner and passed out of the Senate on June 17. The bill, which passed with broad bipartisan support, fully and permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million annually rather than funding levels being determined by the congressional appropriations process each year. It also establishes the National Parks and Public Lands Legacy Fund, directing up to \$9.5 billion over five years to address priority repairs in national parks and other public lands.

“This was a major victory for Senator Gardner, for public lands, and communities throughout the West,” said Kessler. “It marks the end of a decade long campaign by a broad-based coalition to secure full and dedicated funding for the fund.”

Kessler did note that some members of the water community expressed concerns that the Act did not include funding for the Bureau of Reclamation. The National Water Resources Association and Family Farm Alliance highlighted that the bill provided deferred maintenance funding for every federal asset agency within the Department of the Interior except for the Bureau of Reclamation. Like the National Park Service, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Reclamation has significant deferred maintenance needs for federal water supply facilities.

“There was a last-minute effort lead by Senator Martha McSally (R-AZ) to introduce an amendment to establish a revolving loan fund to continuously address those maintenance needs at Reclamation,” said Kessler.

That fund would have allowed water managers to access loans for their outstanding maintenance needs across the West. On June 10, however, the Senate Majority Leader used procedural measures to prevent amendments from being considered by the Senate. The legislation then went back to the House of Representatives, where it was also passed with bipartisan support on July 22nd. The bill was signed into law by the President on August 4th.

## WESTERN WATER INFRASTRUCTURE BILL PASSED BY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

On July 1, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act. The measure is a large infrastructure bill, which provides a total of \$1.5 trillion in authorizations for a wide variety of infrastructure provisions including roads, bridges, aviation, rail, and water. In total, the bill authorizes close to \$70 billion for water infrastructure. The bill includes the text of Congressman Huffman’s FUTURE Western Water Infrastructure and Drought Resiliency Act as well as Congresswoman Torres-Small’s Western Water Security Act.

The FUTURE Western Water Infrastructure and Drought Resiliency Act attempts to provide investments for surface and groundwater storage, while strongly encouraging the use of water recycling, desalination and water efficiency and conservation to improve drought planning and habitat restoration. This bill incorporates several policy ideas to build resilient water infrastructure, expand the use of modern water management tools and technologies and assist disadvantaged areas in meeting their drinking water needs.



## FEDERAL AFFAIRS UPDATE (CONT.)

The **Western Water Security Act** provides funding for western water infrastructure while advancing water conservation, water-use efficiency and environmental restoration programs in the Southwest and other western states. However, it would allow non-governmental organizations to be eligible for the WaterSmart program.

“The River District and other water organizations across the West are engaged in conversations with non-governmental organizations and relevant committee staff on this point of concern,” said Kessler. “It’s our hope that compromise language will be included in the Senate if and when the measure makes it to the upper chamber.”

## SENATOR MICHAEL BENNET TOURS FIRE MOUNTAIN CANAL IN NORTH FORK VALLEY



U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet (D- Colorado), right, and Colorado River District General Manager Andy Mueller, left, toured the North Fork Valley recently to see results of Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) which was written into the 2014 Farm Bill.

The Upper Colorado River Basin was one of eight areas designated in 2014 as a Critical Conservation Area by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through its Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Senator Bennet helped to create the RCPP program in the 2014 Farm Bill to support important, locally driven conservation projects in Colorado. More recently, Senator Bennet successfully reauthorized and increased funding for RCPP within the 2018 Farm Bill. Bennet serves as Ranking Member of the Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, which has jurisdiction over the RCPP Program.



**COLORADO RIVER DISTRICT**  
PROTECTING WESTERN COLORADO WATER SINCE 1937



**A**cross the country, events didn't go as planned this summer. In mid-March, the Colorado River District made a quick pivot to shift our annual State of the River meetings to virtual events. We also added a new webinar series, Water With Your Lunch to explore issues in West Slope water that we don't always address in State of the River meetings. Although we cannot meet in-person, we want you to stay in the know about current events and challenges in West Slope water!

We are actively planning future webinars as part of our Water With Your Lunch series. If you missed one of our past webinars, you can view recordings of previous events, including our State of the River meetings and Water With Your Lunch webinars [here](#).

### REGISTRATION IS OPEN NOW FOR THE COLORADO STATE OF THE RIVER AUG. 19!

**Colorado State of the River**

**6 to 7:30 p.m., Wednesday Aug. 19 on Zoom**

Whether it's for clean water from your kitchen tap, water for hay or livestock or flows to paddle or play on, we all rely on the Colorado River and its tributaries. Learn about current Colorado Basin water issues, ongoing drought and challenges facing West Slope water users at the virtual Colorado State of the River meeting hosted by the Colorado River District.

Register for the event [here](#).

### SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR VIRTUAL ANNUAL SEMINAR SEPT. 21 – 24!

We are currently planning to host our Annual Seminar virtually this fall as the Colorado District's Water Week! We'll be hosting the seminar as a series of free lunchtime webinars Sept. 21 – 24. Once the registration link is live, it will be posted along with information about the agenda and speakers on our website, [coloradoriverdistrict.org](https://coloradoriverdistrict.org), social media and the News Drop newsletter.

