



COLORADO WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

Department of Natural Resources

Bill Owens, Governor

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Update to the Legislature June 2004

Last year the Colorado legislature recognized the critical need to understand and better prepare for our long-term water needs, and authorized the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to implement the Statewide Water Supply Initiative (SWSI). SWSI is an 18-month comprehensive study (final report due to the legislature in November 2004) of how Colorado will meet its future water needs. We wanted to take this opportunity to provide you a summary of the progress of the study and what we have learned to date.

The overarching conclusion that is becoming apparent is that Colorado faces significant challenges in meeting the state's water needs over the coming years. These challenges stem from a number of fundamental factors that reflect the changing nature of our state and the use of our water.

- **Demand for water is growing:** Colorado will need an additional 632,000 acre-feet of water by the year 2030 for municipal and industrial (M&I) use, approximately 40 percent more than is being used today. Nearly two-thirds of this increase, or 409,454 acre-feet, will occur in the South Platte Basin. The addition of 2.8 million residents statewide by the year 2030 is clearly a driving force behind this increased demand, but not the only reason. In addition to this increase in M&I water demands, we are seeing increased pressure on our water resources in all sectors – agricultural, recreational, environmental, and industrial.

- **Smaller water providers and agriculture have limited resources to meet their future water needs:** By the year 2030, 86 percent of the state's

population will live in the corridor stretching from Pueblo to Weld County. Because of their size, the larger municipalities and local water providers in the urban corridor generally have the financial resources and expertise to ensure their customers have enough water. Smaller water providers and agriculture, however, face a different situation. Planning and paying for water projects is an expensive undertaking; rural Colorado may need some help in this regard.

- **We have more needs for our water than in the past:** Water is no longer used just for municipal, agricultural, and industrial uses. Environmental needs, which include flows for fish, river ecosystems, and federal requirements such as the Endangered Species Act, all impact water resource management and development. In addition, the recreational industry has developed to the point where it is a significant contributor to the economy in mountain communities. An adequate supply of water is important to this economic sector.

- **Local projects are key to closing the supply/demand gap:** Of the 632,000 acre-feet the state will need by the year 2030, projects that are either planned or underway by local providers will provide more than 500,000 acre-feet of this demand, leaving an unmet need of approximately 129,000 acre-feet. Ensuring that the local providers are able to implement these projects is therefore critical to our long-term water situation. Without these projects, the problems in securing sufficient water for our future will grow exponentially.

These challenges raise certain issues and questions that the state may need to consider.

- **Planning:** There is a growing interdependency within the state on how we individually and collectively meet our water needs. The larger we grow and the more demands that are placed on this scarce resource, the more important it is that municipalities and local providers share information about how they are using and diverting water. Greater communication and coordination between river basins will be vital to efficient water management and meeting our water needs. In addition, that information can be critically important to ensuring that we fulfill our obligations under agreements such as the Three State Agreement regarding endangered species in the Central Platte and the Colorado River Recovery Program.
- **Funding:** Water projects often benefit more than just the paying customer. For example, recreational and environmental interests can benefit significantly from water projects and their

operations. Should we re-examine traditional methods of paying for water projects with this in mind?

- **How can the interests of smaller water providers and rural Colorado be represented?** Rural Colorado, including agriculture, will continue to be short on resources or expertise to meet its water needs. Consideration should be given to how those interests can be fully protected as our state's water future is determined.

These and other issues will likely come up as SWSI moves through the last phase of the study. The final meeting of the Basin Technical Roundtables will be held in each of the basins in August and September, and the public will be strongly encouraged to attend. Some of our preliminary conclusions will begin to be discussed then. We will continue to keep you apprised of our progress, but please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions or comments.

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