

ALTERNATIVE WATER SOURCES TO MEET FUTURE EAST SLOPE URBAN WATER DEMAND

(Included in the Southwest Roundtable Basin Implementation Plan in Section 5.2.)

The Southwest Basin Roundtable (SWRT) BIP expresses serious concerns over a new TMD because of the potential impacts of the over-development of Colorado River basin supplies could have on the economy, agriculture, and quality of life of west slope communities. Due to the lingering drought, the Colorado River Basin is looking less and less like a reliable source of water to support Colorado's urban development. Recently there has been significant concern about the water levels in Lakes Powell and Mead and there are on-going efforts through "system conservation" and "demand management" to attempt to put more water into Lake Powell through curtailment of existing users. This drought is not an unusual situation based on the tree ring study from 760 to 2010 that shows droughts commonly occur for decades.

The IBCC has developed 7 points as a framework for further discussion of a new TMD, one of them is "The East Slope is not looking for a firm yield from a new TMD project and would accept hydrologic risk for that project." The conceptual thinking has been that the East Slope would only divert when conditions at Lake Powell or the Colorado River Basin were above a yet to be determined trigger amount. Based on the current conditions, Lake Powell hasn't been much above 50% since 2002. Even without knowing what the trigger content might be, it is unlikely that water would have been available for most of the last 15 years under any trigger amount or scenario. In other words, billions of dollars could be spent on a new TMD without achieving the goal of supplying water to the Front Range while minimizing ag dry up and removing the threat to west slope communities.

The SWBRT continues to firmly believe that conservation and reuse must be a major means to reduce demand and address future gaps and that no TMD should proceed unless High Level conservation goals are achieved. However, assuming a new east slope municipal water source is required to minimize ag dry up, there needs to be a thorough analysis of Alternative Water Sources with criteria that include: annual cost per acre-foot of firm yield; benefits to entire State or just a portion of the State (since broader benefits allow costs be spread to more sectors); net environmental benefits; etc. For this to be a meaningful comparative analysis it should be led by the State and "Alternative Water Sources" should be more broadly defined to not just include the Colorado River Basin and alternatives involving storage on the front range, but other reliable Alternative Water Sources with strong emphasis on in-state alternatives. Reclamation's "Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study provides a list of potential water sources north and east of the Colorado River basin such as the Missouri River and Mississippi River for comparison to the Colorado River Basin.

Assuming an Alternative Water Source can be developed and is needed, it will be sometime in the 2040's before any project can be constructed and operational. The other three "legs of the stool", especially conservation (e.g. municipal and ag) will be essential to meeting the interim water demand. The SWRT maintains that meeting High Level conservation goals and reuse is essential and no Alternative Water Sources project should proceed without high levels of municipal conservation. Repayment of construction costs should be commensurate with benefits received.

SWRT asserts that these evaluations are a statewide issue and should be conducted by the State (probably CWCB) because some of the Alternative Water Sources will involve State to State discussions and in some cases compact obligations. Individual or collective water providers are not appropriate entities to represent Colorado in these types of discussions. By having multiple alternatives to consider, the State can play a neutral role in critical comparative evaluation, without being “pre-decisional” concerning potential outcomes. Leadership on the part of the State in a rigorous comparative evaluation process will provide a foundation for the Basin Roundtables, IBCC, CWCB along with water providers, recreational and environmental advocates to work toward a statewide consensus.

In summary, the SWRT does not make this proposal to delay a new TMD but to make sure the billions of dollars that will be spent on a new municipal water source actually provides a firm water supply that will minimize ag dry up. The current drought in the Colorado River basin indicates that a new TMD may also require significant ag dry up to provide a firm supply. Therefore, a new TMD must be considered in comparison with Alternative Water Sources that do not rely on Colorado River basin water supplies. Any such new supply should be designed to minimize impacts on users throughout Colorado.