

COLORADO



58

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“Representing 58 of Colorado’s 64 Counties”

Water Principles

Drought is a naturally occurring part of Colorado’s climatic cycle. The past four years of drought, culminating in the record-setting parched conditions of 2002, have touched every region of the State of Colorado.

Water, or more notably the lack of water, has reached crisis proportions. However, every crisis offers opportunity: opportunity for cooperation, opportunity for understanding, and opportunity to unify diverse positions. Our current drought provides opportunity for all three.

Colorado law recognizes the right to move water from where it flows to where it is needed and to change the historical use of water from one beneficial use to another. In the 130 years since adoption of our constitution, Colorado has grown significantly, both in population and in expanded uses for water. The volume of undeveloped water in Colorado has shrunk tremendously. As our quest for solutions considers transferring water from one part of Colorado for new or different uses in other parts of the state, we must address the impacts such measures have on the people and economies where these waters originate.

The following principles are offered by “Colorado 58” – a coalition representing 58 of Colorado’s 64 counties – to frame the debate about preparing for Colorado’s water future. These principles are intended to inform and assist decision makers and water managers in crafting fair and mutually beneficial water projects, as well as balanced water-related policy and legislation to address Colorado’s water dilemma. The following principles begin our earnest efforts to find water supply answers that benefit all Coloradoans, for this and future generations.

1. All Colorado water users must share in solving Colorado's water resource problems.
2. The State of Colorado should provide assistance, when requested, for local water supply planning and assist in the implementation of consensus-based water resource solutions that respect local authorities, private property and water rights.
3. Development of existing local water supplies should be ~~adequately~~fully explored prior to consideration of new water transfers (e.g., surplus surface water supplies, conjunctive use of groundwater, reuse of existing water supplies, interconnections, and conservation).
4. Additional water storage should be pursued through the improvement and rehabilitation of existing structures and the development of new structures. These activities should be accomplished with local ~~support~~consensus.
5. The right of water rights owners to market their water rights must be protected.
 - a. Colorado must fully explore flexible, market-based approaches to water supply management, including interruptible water contracts, water banking, in-state water leasing and groundwater recharge management.
 - b. Industry and municipalities should lease, rather than purchase, agricultural water so that the water can revert to agricultural use if conditions in the future warrant.
 - c. In the event that agricultural water is transferred, the transaction must adequately address the need for maintaining the existing tax base, protecting the remaining water rights in the area, and maintaining the proper stewardship of the land including revegetation and weed control.
6. A balance must be maintained between the development of water for beneficial consumptive uses and the preservation of the flows necessary to support recreational, hydroelectric, and environmental needs.
7. Adverse economic, environmental, and social impacts of future water projects and water transfers must be minimized; unavoidable adverse impacts must be mitigated, including both the immediate and long-term impacts attributable to water transfers. Locally affected communities must have the opportunity to assist in defining appropriate mitigation for each project.
8. Future water supply solutions must benefit both the area of origin and the area of use.
9. Water conservation measures that do not injure other water rights should be aggressively pursued.

10. There must be an ongoing, concerted effort to educate all Coloradans on the importance of water, and the need to conserve, manage, and plan for the needs of this and future generations.
11. Water generation efforts i.e. increasing timber harvests and other vegetative management techniques to increase water production from the forests that do not injure watersheds should be aggressively pursued.