

## Water group offers vision of how Front Range's future will flow

### Predictions call for higher prices, efficiency rules

By **Jerd Smith**, Rocky Mountain News

Published September 19, 2008 at 11:42 a.m.

**CORRECTION:**An earlier version of this story should have said that the cost of a single-family home water tap in Aurora is \$20,800.

In 50 years, housing developments will be packed tight, water prices will be sky high and cities such as Denver, Fort Collins and Colorado Springs will share their expensive water systems instead of insisting that everything remain separate, as they do today.

Or that's what a powerful new coalition of cities, known as the Front Range Water Council, believes must occur to stave off looming water shortages.

Council members include Denver Water, the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Colorado Springs, Aurora, Pueblo and the Southeastern Water Conservancy District.

"We know there is a better way to do things," said Eric Wilkinson, manager of the Northern

Colorado Water Conservancy District, which serves Fort Collins, Loveland and Greeley, among others.

Wilkinson's comments came Friday at a meeting of more than 200 water managers and elected officials. It was the first time the council has presented its vision to the powerful Western Slope water establishment, from which most of Colorado's Front Range derives its water.

"You're going to see more water conservation," said Mark Pifher, manager of Aurora Water. "You're going to see mandatory efficiency devices and you're going to see 'full cost' water."

He said a water tap in Aurora for a single-family home costs \$20,800 today, which is several thousand dollars higher than the price tag even five years ago.

"That's going to become the norm in the future," Pifher said.

Slashing water use by raising prices, reducing lawns by placing houses shoulder-to-shoulder and mandating energy-efficient clothes washers and shower heads will help the Front Range cope with water shortages, Pifher said.

"You're going to see urban planners and city councils pack (houses) in close because it's more cost effective and efficient," Pifher said. "As costs escalate, people are going to rethink where they want to live and how much water they want to use."

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Beyond cost, though, Pifher and Wilkinson said the Front Range would have to team with the Western Slope to build at least one major water project that could supply both sides of the Continental Divide.

And they said they would like to see the state rethink how much water it provides for the fish and kayakers. "I know that's controversial," Wilkinson said.

But as water supplies tighten, Wilkinson said, it will be important that cities use environmental supplies at least temporarily, particularly in drought years.

Eric Kuhn, manager of the Colorado River District, the largest utility on the Western Slope, said Colorado should take an ultra-cautious approach to developing the state's remaining supplies, giving a small amount to the Front Range, a small amount to the Western Slope and the environment, and setting some aside for energy development.

No major projects should be built until better science on global warming and chronic drought can be developed, he said, something likely to take another 30 years.

"Why don't we start small, see what we can develop, and in 30 years or so re-evaluate where we are? We have to use what we've got with great love and care," he said.

Looking ahead

How water shortages could reshape the Front Range by 2058:

- \* Cities will be super-dense to shrink lawns and shorten water pipelines.
- \* Water prices will soar to pay for new water systems and force conservation.
- \* Regional water utilities will be formed so costs can be shared and reduced.
- \* Large swaths of irrigated farmland will go dry.
- \* Rules governing existing federal reservoirs will be changed so that cities can use them, instead of building new facilities.

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