



**For Immediate Release**

**June 5, 2009**

GLENWOOD SPRINGS – The boards of the Colorado River District and its sister water conservation district, the Southwest District, met in Durango yesterday in a rare joint meeting to review progress on a planned water bank designed to address the potential impacts of an interstate compact call on Colorado River water users. Together both districts cover the entire Colorado River watershed in Colorado.

Tom Iseman reviewed work he and The Nature Conservancy conducted for the two districts on a conceptual plan for a “Compact Water Bank.” This concept is intended to minimize the risk and impacts of an interstate curtailment of water use if the four upper states of the Colorado River basin fail to meet the water deliver requirements of the 1922 Colorado River Compact. The Colorado River has never experienced an interstate compact call; however, mindful of development of new water uses, potential for climate change, and inevitable drought cycles, the two boards consider planning for a possible curtailment critical.

Still in its formative stages, the two districts explored establishment of a water bank specifically to address the impacts of an interstate compact call. The two boards discussed the opportunities and benefits, as well as costs, of operating such a program and resolved to continue working toward creation of a water bank for this purpose.

The 1922 Colorado River Compact grandfathers all water uses in existence at the time of the interstate agreement, protecting them from interruption or curtailment. Rather than experience an uncontrolled rush to purchase these senior rights, the two water districts are exploring establishment of a “water bank” into which senior water rights could be placed for temporary use by critical (e.g., drinking water and fire fighting) junior water uses that would be called out by an interstate compact call.

In this unique type of water bank, water users with pre-1922 rights would be compensated for entering into an agreement to offer their senior water rights that are exempt from compact administration to junior users who would otherwise be called out by compact delivery requirements. Junior water users, in turn, could “subscribe” to the bank as a sort of insurance policy in the event of a compact call on their water rights. The bank would serve as the administrator and clearing house for those with senior, pre-1922 water rights and those with junior rights needing an alternative source of water. Temporary use of senior rights by juniors would only be permitted if a compact call were in effect or imminent.

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Interviews with potential “customers” of the bank indicate that those with water rights junior to 1922, especially municipalities on both sides of the Continental Divide would be interested in participating.

The Colorado River basin is the primary source of water not just for those within the basin but also for a majority of Colorado’s Front Range that divert water from the headwaters across the Continental Divide to the East Slope, primarily for municipal use. The Colorado River provides between 25 and 75% of the total water supply for cities ranging from Fort Collins to Pueblo.

Roughly one million acre feet of senior pre-1922 water rights exist on the West Slope, mostly agricultural rights. Not all, however, can be safely or economically interrupted by the bank for one or more years and then be returned to their historical use. Irrigation water for fruit trees, for instance, would not be appropriate for participation in this sort of water bank.

Iseman stressed the considerable benefits of such a program, including possible delay or prevention of a compact call or mitigation of impacts for an interstate call. He told both boards that more input from potential participants, both senior and junior water rights owners, is needed.

Bruce Whitehead, general manager of the Southwest District, told Iseman, “We really appreciate your efforts and the direction it provides us for our next steps. Western Colorado has an obvious interest in addressing this issue proactively. We don’t want to see an uncontrolled market in buy up and dry up of western Colorado’s senior water rights.”

To learn more about the Colorado River District and its work, visit [www.ColoradoRiverDistrict.org](http://www.ColoradoRiverDistrict.org).

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