

Grand County water outlook 'about average'

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Water officials predict an average water year for Grand County streams and lakes, according to charts and graphs presented during the Colorado River District's annual "State of the River" meeting.

"It's not a great year, but it's not a bad year," said Mike Eytel, water resources specialist for the Colorado River District.

On May 1, the Upper Colorado showed 90 percent to 109 percent of average, according to Bob Steger, manager of raw water supply for Denver Water.

During that same time period in the South Platte Basin, where Denver obtains half of its water in an average year, the water table showed 70 percent to 89 percent of average. The more water available on the South Platte, he explained, the less pressure to divert West Slope water.

The South Platte drainage has been below average nearly all year, he said.

Steger's presentation closed with an encouraging note to a Grand County audience at the Mountain Parks Electric meeting room in Granby on Thursday: Denver Water budgeted \$10 million for water-conservation measures this year, which amounts to more than three-fourths of all conservation-program money spent by water providers in the state of Colorado.

Quota-setting for the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District was a gamble this year with a dry spell leading up to an April 1 quota date, according to Jeff Drager, deputy manager of Northern Water.

Northern settled on an 80 percent quota. A 100 percent quota means each owner of one C-BT unit gets one acre foot — the higher the quota, the more East Slope water is supplemented by C-BT water.

Drager said Northern set an initial quota of 60 percent in November, then reassessed in April.

"Usually when we raise the quota, about two or three days later it starts raining, and that's what happened this year again," Drager said.

Lake Granby, which when full amounts to about 539,000 acre-feet, was sitting at 283,835 acre feet on May 1. "We think that later this year in November it will be at about 400,000," Drager said. "We are in better shape this year over last year because we've had more water stored in our East Slope reservoirs because of some work done on Carter Lake," he said.

Where Lake Granby is roughly 35 feet down at present, it's expected to raise 15-20 feet — about 15 feet from full level — in July.

To take part in Shadow Mountain Reservoir and Grand Lake water-quality management, Northern plans to shut down C-BT-Adams Tunnel flows from July 31 to August 13 this year, during which water clarity studies are likely to take place.

Drager said two weeks was as long as Northern could comply with shutting down C-BT operations due to power-generation constraints on the system.

"I am going to advocate that we agree to a more robust monitoring program for the two weeks stop-pump period and ask for a six-week period, two weeks preceding and two weeks following," said Grand County Water Quality Specialist Katherine Morris.

Grand County is part of a multi-agency group bound to investigate clarity problems in the C-BT system. "I think that's a remarkable opportunity to learn of the effects of pumping and diverting water on water quality in Grand Lake and Shadow Mountain Reservoir," she said.

Plans at Windy Gap are to pump 23,000 acre-feet this year, Drager said.

Since May 11, both pumps have been in full swing, pumping 365 cfs at Windy Gap. Last year, Windy Gap pumped 30,000 acre feet.

This year's "State of the River" meeting was themed "Water - Our Greatest Liquid Asset" in a year when all other assets seem to be disappearing in an economic recession, said Chris Treece, manager of the Colorado River District.

On that note, several other pressing water topics were explored during the meeting, such as: The Division of Wildlife's newly adopted boat inspections program to stop the spread of zebra and quagga mussels; the Bureau of Land Management's Wild and Scenic eligibility that includes a section of the Colorado River starting at Windy Gap, Muddy Creek below Wolford, Troublesome Creek, Rabbit Ears Creek, Kinney Creek and Sulphur Gulch; a nearly completed Upper Colorado Watershed Assessment — a study that identifies the area's most critical watersheds that are main sources of drinking water vulnerable to wildfire damage; and the Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery federal mandate in which the West Slope may need to ante up at least \$8 million for its participation by 2012.

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