

Shepherding Water in Colorado for Colorado River Compact Security

Workshop - November 14, 2017

Brief Summary

A workshop on shepherding water within the State of Colorado for the purpose of providing security under the Colorado River Compact was hosted by the Colorado Water Institute and the Getches-Wilkinson Center for Natural Resources, Energy and the Environment on Nov. 14, 2017 in Summit County. The purpose of the workshop was to obtain perspectives from the participants about shepherding and the larger context of Compact security that it is part of. Attendees included individuals associated with state and local government, water providers and users, municipalities, industry, conservation and conservancy districts, and environmental groups.

Presentations were made on the risk of curtailment under the Colorado River Compact, the State Engineer's authorities to deal with Compact compliance and related issues, the role of the Upper Colorado River Commission, and various proposals about how to accomplish water shepherding for Compact security. All participants, including the presenters, were expressing their personal views and not the positions of their organizations.

Small discussion groups guided by specific questions allowed for candid conversation among the attendees about water shepherding and the many other issues associated with Compact security. A detailed report on the workshop and discussions is available at <http://www.cwi.colostate.edu/>. The areas in which there was great consensus among the workshop participants, the areas of disagreement or in which there were multiple ideas about how to proceed, and the areas of need for further information or additional discussion are listed below. All agreed that this was a timely conversation, that the workshop was merely a first step, and that significant additional outreach and discussion must follow.

Areas of Agreement

1. We need to be discussing Compact security and shepherding water right now.
2. This workshop is a good first step but we need broader participation in these discussions.
3. We need to recognize that shepherding is part of a larger problem and that Compact security as a whole must be addressed.
4. We have insufficient stakeholder awareness of Colorado River Compact risk and agreement on the urgency of the problem.

5. The Upper Colorado River Commission should be involved in this discussion.
6. Legislation, if needed, should be part of a larger package addressing Compact security overall.

Areas of Disagreement or Varying Ideas

1. Is it better to wait and allow curtailment to occur or to take proactive steps soon to avoid curtailment?
2. How soon and in what manner do we need to act to avoid loss of power production from Glen Canyon Dam and the likelihood of curtailment of Colorado water uses?
3. Will legislation be required at some point to implement a Compact security program including providing for the shepherding of water?
4. The appropriate leaders for the discussions on Compact security and shepherding within Colorado and in the Upper Basin.
5. When do other states get involved?

Areas Where More Information or Additional Discussion Is Needed

1. What is the risk of Compact curtailment/loss of hydropower production? It should be noted that the sentiment was expressed that we currently have all the information on this issue that we are reasonably able to develop at this time. Others noted that this issue is still being addressed in the Risk Study, now jointly managed by the Colorado River Water Conservation District and the Colorado Water Conservation Board, and elsewhere.
2. How much risk is acceptable?
3. How much water is needed in Lake Powell to avoid compact curtailment or the loss of hydropower production?
4. How would Compact curtailment be implemented? What would be the impacts? What could be done to minimize those impacts?
5. What would a proactive Compact security program look like?
6. Do we need a water bank in Lake Powell to manage this water? If so, how would this bank be operated? Would having a credit/ debit account in Powell to counter evaporation, separate from system water, be feasible? Could Colorado have a credit account if other Upper Basin states don't participate?
7. Is the accumulation of wet water in Lake Powell an effective approach or could a virtual water bank that relies on water lease options be sufficient? What amount of such leases would have to be under option and at what cost? Are there sufficient sources of Compact security water to make a difference?
8. Where would Compact security water come from and what are the primary and secondary impacts associated with making this water available?
9. Where would the funding come from?
10. How do we account for this water and who does the accounting?
11. How should new depletions be treated to avoid undermining the effect of conservation?