

## CWCB reviews results from CO River water availability

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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Preliminary results from a multi-year study on the Colorado River suggests the state still has water available to develop, but additional research is needed to better quantify how much, state water officials said.

The draft results of Phase I of the Colorado River Water Availability study were presented to the Colorado Water Conservation Board at its Jan. 27 meeting. The draft report will be released for public comment next month.

“The Colorado River is one of the most important sources of water supply for the state,” said Jennifer Gimbel, director of the CWCB. “Colorado needs solid information in order to make smart decisions about future water development. This is probably the most rigorous assessment that has ever been completed of future water supply in the Colorado River basin and it’s telling us we still have a lot more to learn.”

The study looked at hydrology, water rights and current water uses in all four West Slope Colorado River Basins, then used five separate climate change models to predict the probable physical water supply in the streams in the year 2040.

One of the models suggested Colorado could have as much as 900,000 acre-feet of consumptive use available under the terms of the Colorado River Compact. However another model suggested if climate impacts are more severe, Colorado may have no water left to develop.

The study assumed a worst-case scenario in which the other Upper Basin states fully developed their entire share of the river and federal storage used in meeting the Upper Basin’s compact requirements has been drained by drought.

Another element of the Phase I study examined a baseline of 1,100 measuring stations and tried to predict how climate change could affect individual streams. These modeling runs showed a general trend of earlier run-off and less water available than in the past.

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The water availability study was funded by the legislature in 2007 to evaluate water availability in the Colorado River Basin. The study estimates the amount of water that is available for consumptive and non-consumptive, or in-stream, uses in the Colorado River basin and its tributaries. Phase I did not assess legal water supply or consider the potential impact of conditional water rights on future availability.

“This is a planning study that will help the state and water users better calculate risks of any particular project,” said CWCB chair Geoff Blakeslee. “But based on the results of this modeling, I think we all recognize how important it will be for Colorado to pursue future research.”

Future Phase II work will assess remaining water availability for future levels of municipal, industrial, agricultural, recreational and other in-stream water needs.

The draft study will be available for review in February. The state board will review draft results of Phase I and consider public input before finalizing the study and plans for Phase II work scheduled to begin this spring.

Additional information on the Colorado River Water Availability study is available on the CWCB web site at <http://cwcb.state.co.us/WaterInfo/CRWAS>.