

**DRAFT**

**SOUTHWEST BASINS ROUNDTABLE**

**Michael Preston, Chair**

**c/o Dolores Water Conservancy District**

**P.O. Box 1150**

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July 16, 2010

Jennifer Gimbel, Director  
Colorado Water Conservation Board  
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721  
Denver, Colorado 80203

Re: Comments on the Colorado River Water Availability Study Phase 1

Dear Ms. Gimbel,

On behalf of the Southwest Basins Roundtable, I would like to thank Ray Alvarado for providing a detailed presentation of the Colorado River Water Availability Study at our July 7, 2010 Roundtable meeting. The Roundtable was impressed by the extent and complexity of this effort.

After questions and discussion of Ray Alvarado's presentation the Roundtable provided comments as outlined below:

1. The Roundtable found the range of variability of available water from 0 to 1 million acre feet as contributing to, rather than helping to settle, polarization among the divergent interests who have a stake in the outcome of Phases 1 and 2 of the Study. Uncertainty surrounding this wide range is compounded by the fact that all climate change scenarios are considered to be of equal probability.
2. The Roundtable concluded that Phase 2 should only be undertaken if the result will be a narrowing of this availability gap and provide a most probable scenario for use at the Basin level.
3. A necessary step prior to Phase 2 is to correct errors in the Phase 1 analysis. For example, the operation of several Bureau of Reclamation reservoirs should be based on contractual allocations rather than simulated irrigation demand.
4. Another step towards a most probable scenario would be to focus on the Historical Average Monthly Modeled Streamflow which falls within the range of the five climate generated stream flows in Appendix E.

5. Since the CRWAS is a statewide model intended as a tool for planning, our Roundtable suggests a prominent disclaimer on how information in the report should and should not be used. We are concerned, for example, about the use of this information in water rights applications, compact curtailments, and other State Agency studies and evaluations.
6. Ray Alvarado framed the Study as a tool to help people at the Basin level to make informed decisions about the future. The Roundtable discussed a number of variables that will need to be monitored over time to make decisions going forward. These include crop changes if the growing season expands, the ongoing application of more efficient irrigation technologies and the impact on return flows, changes in the monsoon season as a critical element in water management in our Basin and unfolding efforts to come to grips with non-consumptive uses.
7. Because the Southwest Basins are in the transitional climate belt between the northern latitudes that are projected to see increased precipitation and the more southern latitudes that are projected to see less precipitation, we need to see how any climate change in our Basin plays out between these poles. Key variables of influence in this regard are our topography including elevation, slope and aspect. To make Phase 2 a useful tool in our Basin, a framework that would help us evaluate and track on these Basin level details would be more useful than climate projections base on global modeling.
8. The Roundtable recommends that before initiating Phase 2 of the CRWAS, a better understanding of assumptions underlying Phase 1 and correction of Phase 1 errors (e.g. reservoir operations) should be facilitated, along with Roundtable level input into shaping Phase 2.

We very much appreciate this opportunity to comment on Phase 1 of the CRWAS. We are aware of the challenges, both technical and budgetary in advancing the CRWAS as a useful planning tool. We are interested in continuing to work with you and Ray in shaping our comments and concerns into practical steps forward in this process.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Preston, Chair  
Southwest Basins Roundtable

Cc. Ray Alvarado  
Greg Johnson

