



---

## The Reason for the Plan

Russell George

CWCB Board of Directors - Colorado River Mainstream Representative

---

On January 28, 2013, the staff and members of the Colorado Water Conservation Board completed a series of discussions on strategic planning. We researched and answered questions like these: are we looking clearly behind us to assure that we understand how and why decisions were made; are we ready and able to recognize and embrace change; are we timely and appropriate in our current efforts to provide for today's needs and demands; are we ready for the knowable and unknowable future which lies ahead; and are we leading or are we following? Ultimately the results of this scrutiny were memorialized in the "Strategic Framework" which is summarized here:

Mission: Conserve, develop, protect and manage Colorado's water for present and future generations.

Role: The CWCB is the State's water policy agency. The Board is objective and has a statewide perspective. The Board: 1) provides common technical platforms for planning and policy decisions; 2) builds and manages information to guide actions; 3) helps reduce the impacts of floods and droughts; 4) takes actions to protect Colorado's compact entitlements; 5) holds instream flow water rights to preserve the natural environment to a reasonable degree; and 6) works with partners to develop policies and implement strategies for meeting Colorado's consumptive and non-consumptive water needs.

Priority: The CWCB's priority is to help ensure that Colorado has adequate water to meet all of Colorado's water needs and to reduce the impacts of natural hazards through **Policy, Projects and Partnerships**.

Focus: The CWCB helps implement water resource strategies that are informed by broad stakeholder input, the best available data and objective analyses. The focus is on action, serving as a valued partner, and coordinating across programs.

Measure of Success: The CWCB measures its success by the number of projects, processes, and strategies it moves forward to accomplish and meets its mission and statutory obligations. By doing so, the CWCB enables its partners to be successful.

Now roll forward to May 14, 2013. On that day, Executive Order 2013-005 injected a "shot of adrenalin" into the Strategic Framework as it directed the CWCB to commence work on "Colorado's Water Plan" and gave the deadline to finish as December 2015. Simply put, this order shifted the ground beneath our feet. And so, the work began, as is now well known and documented for its enormity and challenge.

It soon became apparent that we were researching and writing a resource text book of historical proportions. Never before had Colorado attempted to capture, combine, analyze, sort, process, articulate and imagine all the moving parts comprising the organism known as Colorado's water. We soon knew we were working on something much more than a novel.

The effort was made to reach our scientific, legal, sociological, governmental, environmental, and economic arms around every aspect and facet of Colorado's water—paleo to future—and then to instruct on how to collaborate, integrate, interweave, align, utilize, familiarize, distinguish, assemble, and reaffirm all of it in the way forward to implement decisions that achieved the greatest good for the greatest possible number of present and future Colorado water users.

We have not intended for the plan to identify and select future structures and users. Rather, our hope has been to provide to all persons on an equal access basis all the same facts, details, research results, information, and knowledge to freely utilize as desired and needed to plan and protect their own futures and destinies. We have hoped to create a tool by which all persons or entities could fairly and freely participate in the “asking and answering” of the critical water use questions of today and tomorrow. We have hoped to develop a road map by which the CWCB, as the state's official water policy agency, could guide itself to fulfillment of its Strategic Framework. We have hoped to create a call to action for all Colorado citizens, organizations, and businesses.

Lots more can and will be said about this effort and product we call “Colorado's Water Plan.” One idea remains clear and true: the outstanding goals of this plan can and will be achieved when each of us—government and citizen alike—study the content of the plan and its expansive resource library of references and attachments and rely on this information to make decisions. When we all work from the same facts, we are more likely to reach the fairest and wisest choices. This is heavy lifting, but it is the only way. Each of us must take responsibility and carry our own weight in moving forward successfully in “Collaborating on Colorado's Water Future.”

*About the author: Russ has served on the CWCB Board since March 2011 and has been reappointed twice. Russ is a fourth generation native of the Rifle, Colorado area. Until his recent retirement, he served as president of Colorado Northwestern Community College in Rangely and Craig. His previous state government service over the past 22 years includes Executive Director of the Department of Transportation, Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources, Director of the Division of Parks and Wildlife, and Speaker and member of the House of Representatives. Russ practiced law in Rifle for 25 years after graduating from Colorado State University and Harvard Law School.*