
Through Demand Management & Beyond: A Perspective from Northwest Colorado

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1 The author talking demand management at Echo Park, the confluence of the Yampa and Green Rivers. Courtesy Kent Vertrees.

The Colorado Water Conservation Board will begin hosting Colorado River Demand Management committee work sessions in late summer and early fall. The meetings will be open to the public, including members of the Colorado Water Conservation Board and InterBasin Compact Committee, and structured in a way that allows committee members to create their own agendas, format and rules of engagement. As a reminder, the committees are: law and policy; monitoring and verification; water-rights administration and accounting; environmental considerations; economic considerations and local government; funding; education and outreach; and agricultural impacts.



2 Yamcolo Reservoir – Courtesy Scott Hummer

The Demand Management committee process should be a useful social experiment to see how a demand management program would play out in the day to day lives of all water users. There are a surprising number of Coloradans in every basin that are engaged and enthusiastic about digging into this topic and that speaks volumes about the folks in our water community. Could demand management be a tool that people would reach for – like a table saw, or is it that saw you bought for one project, destined to live in the back of the toolshed forever?

For the past eight months, members of the Yampa White Basin Roundtable and the public have been working in what we call, the “Big River Committee”. In true “Water for the 21st Century” style, the group has spent many hours discussing back of the napkin calculations, legal opinions from the 1980’s, and walking through scenarios attempting to set the stage for what demand management, or its sibling – curtailment, could mean for our basin.

In an effort to shake things up, the Big River Committee occasionally meets for cheeseburgers instead of in office spaces – making sure to bring beef production full circle in our conversations! The broad issues we have singled out include; the definition of demand management parameters, implementation within our current plumbing schematic, refinement and the unification of our basin’s policy statements. We do our best to weigh these issues against future curtailment rulemaking, and how the two options can be compared with so many pieces missing.



3 Lake Powell 2018

More minute questions are a part of the conversation, too. What is the actual value and impact of a DM curtailment that produces a 500 KAF reduction in water use? Will income from demand management to a producer be used to purchase feed from somewhere else in the basin? Can we, or should we develop a definition of conserved consumptive use? And, of course, there is the question of parity - between water users, basins, population centers - as well as between the Upper and Lower basins while on the horizon of negotiating the Interim Guidelines.



4 Mike Camblin, Maybell irrigator, with his new automated waste gate system.

Many other West Slope basin roundtables have engaged in similar processes and when coupled with the work of the three Risk Studies performed by Hydros Consulting for the West Slope, there are almost endless questions to be discussed. There is similar work being produced on the Front Range as well, which will host its own regional questions. The answers can't come from one basin, nor should they. The answers need to tap our water users from basins like the Arkansas and the Rio Grande, to inform, assist, and remind us that solutions are out there - and the pitfalls exist too.

The question at hand is what is best for Colorado as we move into a different climate - one with more people and more varied runoff components. Colorado depends on both its urban centers and its rural communities equally. As Coloradans continue to become more connected to their resources - through the news, social media, their local Colorado food choices, and expanding educational opportunities - we can continue to see more connections between the two ways of life.

I believe that these conversations surrounding Demand Management will lead our best work, with solutions broader and more innovative than those before. Those solutions will be the product of us as individuals continuing to leave our

aging habits and arguments behind, while recognizing our limitations and our opportunities. The important work we all do - providing drinking water, food, land stewardship, and power while securing healthy rivers for recreational and the environment - is what makes Colorado the best place to live, especially in the Yampa and White basin! But, I am a little biased.