

BASIN ROUNDTABLE SUMMIT

Executive Summary

March 6, 2014



Background

The Third Statewide Basin Roundtable Summit was held in Golden, Colorado on March 6, 2014. It was attended by members of the nine basin roundtables and interested members of the public; 336 individuals participated in total. The Summit included presentations and panel sessions on a wide range of subjects but was focused on basin roundtable participation and feedback. Participants were seated at diverse discussion tables to encourage integrative and cross-basin dialogue about Colorado's Water Plan, Interbasin Compact Committee (IBCC) progress, and the basin implementation planning process. Afternoon breakout sessions were more targeted toward specific components of water supply planning and allowed for additional exploration of key themes and ideas.

Summit Goals

GOAL ONE

Provide a forum for basin roundtables to share progress on Basin Implementation Plans, goals, and measurable outcomes statewide.

GOAL TWO

Raise awareness statewide regarding the status of the IBCC's conceptual agreement and allow for additional input from basin roundtables.

GOAL THREE

Engage in Colorado's Water Plan and discuss the strategy for incorporating basin implementation plans into the water plan.

GOAL FOUR

Showcase the methods used by basin roundtables to engage local level stakeholders and the public in the basin implementation planning process.

Welcome

John Stulp: Thank you for your ongoing commitment to resolving Colorado's water challenges in an open and collaborative way. The voluntary time and effort put in to date by basin roundtable members is greatly appreciated. The development of Colorado's Water Plan is an important and historic process and the grassroots approach embodied by the basin roundtables is crucial to its success. It will take a great deal of work, but the result will shape Colorado's water history.

Overview of Colorado's Water Plan

James Eklund: Many in the past and currently have expressed doubts about the need for Colorado's Water Plan, stating that the doctrine of prior appropriation is sufficient. Colorado's Water Plan will work within prior appropriation and demonstrate that the doctrine works and is capable of meeting the serious challenges that we face. The basin roundtable process is central to Colorado's Water Plan. Basin roundtable involvement will test a hypothesis that when Coloradans come together in a grassroots process armed with good facts, they will agree more often than they disagree. Colorado's Water Plan will be dynamic. Its completion in 2015 will mark the beginning, and not the end, of the process. The State is working to reach out to chambers of commerce, business representatives, and others with key messages about the value of water and planning strategies moving forward.

Participant Perspectives: Flexibility, creativity, and collaboration are needed, and all "four legs of the stool" should be balanced. Multipurpose projects may be able to help achieve watershed health, while meeting supply gaps in municipal and industrial (M&I), agricultural, and nonconsumptive arenas. Storage for flexibility is a possible solution to consumptive and nonconsumptive issues. Additional public outreach is needed.



Update on IBCC Progress

No/low regrets actions are based on the scenario planning process and represent near-term strategies that should be undertaken sooner rather than later, because they are needed no matter what future Colorado faces. If the No/Low Regrets Action Plan is not carried out, more controversial actions (e.g., increased agricultural transfers, transmountain diversions) will need to occur. The IBCC has given substantial consideration to each of the “legs of the stool” and continues to look for new ways to meet the state’s water supply needs while also maintaining agriculture and environmental and recreational values. The IBCC is currently focused on developing a conceptual agreement on new supply and is hopeful that the growing understanding and empathy among IBCC members will lead to a creative agreement that benefits everyone.

Participant perspectives: State funding should be used to the greatest efficiency possible and should incentivize and support IPPs, conservation, efficiency, and alternative transfer methods (ATMs), among other things. Repairing and improving existing projects should also be prioritized. No and low regret actions are very important for Colorado’s water future, but each basin should have the freedom to pursue them in the most optimal manner. Flexibility is needed in the development of new projects using Colorado River water, and risk management is a critical.



Governors Hickenlooper, Ritter, and Owens have all supported the basin roundtables and the IBCC. The HB1177 process has been a continuous arc from 2005 to the present, through three administrations, and across party lines. Colorado’s Water Plan is an extension of this process.

The basin roundtables have shown how individuals with different political and geographic affiliations can come together to talk about broader shared interests instead of narrow self-interests.

-Gov. John Hickenlooper

Basin roundtable members deserve a great deal of appreciation for the work they do and the bottom-up approach they participate in.

-Former Gov. Bill Owens

These great ideas are turning into great efforts, and the resourcefulness of the basins and the IBCC continue to serve Colorado.

-Former Gov. Bill Ritter

Status of Basin Implementation Plans (BIPs)

All of the BIPs are progressing toward the July 31 deadline for the completion of a first draft. Although each BIP focuses on basin-specific issues and approaches, each BIP is working to address all four “legs of the stool” in one way or another. Some roundtables are bringing additional issues into their BIPs, such as risk management, land use management, and groundwater recharge. Nearly all of the roundtables are engaged in cross-basin collaboration on one or more BIP topics or strategies, and BIP contractors and roundtable members are pursuing public outreach in some exciting and creative ways.



	Component is “important” or “very important” to meet state water supply needs	Component should play a “moderate” or “very big” role in my BIP
Conservation	96%	91%
ATMs	95%	85%
IPPs	95%	95%
Colorado Compact: preservation of development options	92%	78%
Environmental and recreational needs	92%	90%
Risk management	98%	93%

Additionally, 73% of respondents believe that everyone in Colorado is responsible for addressing the state’s water supply needs. 75% of participants believe that multiple negative consequences will result if we fail to find shared solutions to address water supply gaps. 92% of respondents believe that the work of the basin roundtables, IBCC, and CWCB is “important” or “very important.”

New information about Colorado's Water Plan

James Eklund, in response to participant questions in two afternoon breakout sessions:

- The role of state and federal agencies: The State of Colorado will need to make sure that all water users, including state and federal agencies, are involved in Colorado's water planning process.
- Pre-approval of water projects: Colorado is not at a point yet where the State is offering "pre-approval" of projects through Colorado's Water Plan. However, Colorado's Water Plan will ultimately support projects that meet its values through streamlined permitting processes.
- Integration with SWSI: SWSI started in 2004, and the 2016 update is currently underway. SWSI and the Colorado water planning process are parallel and will be continually updated. SWSI helps us understand the challenges we have; Colorado's Water Plan is focused more on finding solutions.
- PPPs: We do not know yet how private-public partnerships for water supply projects will work, but the idea is for a company to fund, build, and manage a project, which will allow it to be more efficient and lean.
- The Draft BIP deadline: The Draft BIPs delivered to CWCB in July will be a snapshot in time, but the plans will continue to evolve and change over time.

Preserving Options for Developing Colorado's Compact Entitlement

Context from basin roundtable chairs: The East Slope roundtables are engaging in numerous planning efforts and projects to demonstrate that they have their house in order through measures like conservation, reuse, IPPs, and ATMs. However, these actions are not sufficient to meet a projected water supply gap, and preserving the option of a transmountain diversion is important. West Slope basin roundtables chairs support the steps East Slope basin roundtables are taking in terms of reuse, conservation, and ATMs, including legislation to further these measures. Some West Slope basin roundtables have concerns about the details of East Slope IPPs and new supply development projects and how they might affect Colorado River supplies. At the request of the IBCC, the nine basin roundtable chairs are currently engaged in discussions about whether and how to preserve the option for new supply development.

Participant perspectives: Obtaining a state water right to preserve the option for a transmountain diversion is an interesting idea to some and could be pursued in conjunction with a water bank concept. The timeline for discussing new supply within the scope of Colorado's Water Plan is difficult, particularly as it pertains to risk management. While these conversations occur, agricultural buy-and-dry continues. Some question the need to discuss the development of water rights beyond the context of existing water law. Creative partnerships and multi-faceted approaches to Colorado Compact entitlement are needed to make new projects acceptable and feasible.

Watershed Health

A cross-basin approach

When beginning the watershed health component of the Arkansas BIP, the Arkansas Basin Roundtable realized that watershed health was a common concern among basins and that communication between local, state, and federal agencies could be critical during events that impacted it. The Roundtable put together a cross-basin, multi-agency group to tackle this issue. That group requested participants' views on the watershed uses or values that need to be protected, the threats to those values, barriers to protecting them, and partners who can help.

Participant perspectives: Key values related to watershed health include human safety, infrastructure for water supplies, wildlife habitat, water quality, recreation, and oil and gas wells. Threats to watershed health mainly relate to fire, floods, and associated impacts. Barriers to the protection of watershed health identified by the group included communication between entities and agencies, boundaries of authority, and insufficiency information. Numerous potential partnerships were identified: federal agencies (USFS, BLM, NRCs); state agencies (CPW, CSFS); local fire protection districts; conservation organizations, watershed groups and community foundations; industry (beverage companies, ski areas).

*There is tremendous
expertise out there
when it comes to
watershed health.*

*We just need to
get the right people
together in a room.*

-Gary Barber

Exploring the Initial Basin Implementation Plan Interests and Policy Proposals

Context from basin roundtable chairs: Chairs were asked to speak about shared interests in their BIPs. Streamlining of permitting processes, conservation, high success rates for IPPs, and preservation of agriculture were some of the key interests highlighted by the chairs.

Participant perspectives: Agricultural efficiency is an important concept to incorporate into BIPs. However, policies dealing with agriculture efficiencies should focus on local policies and not be mandated. Agricultural efficiency can mean different things to different people. It has worked well in the Rio Grande Basin but can be especially problematic in the South Platte Basin, where efficiency is often harmful to downstream users. Soil moisture gains from inefficient practices can benefit crops later in the season and are therefore not inefficient. Current indoor fixture legislation and potential conservation measures for municipal outdoor water use may also be important to the BIP process.



Colorado River Issues

There is not a projected Compact curtailment on the Colorado River in the near future, but there is a potential for reservoir levels at Lake Powell and Lake Mead to fall below critical levels.
-John McClow, Commissioner of the Upper Colorado River Commission

John McClow presentation: Following an overview of the history and current status of the Colorado River Compact, John stressed that there is not a projected Compact curtailment in the near future, but that there is a potential for reservoir levels at Lake Powell and Lake Mead to fall below critical levels. Because the federal government would almost certainly intervene if power generation or water supply infrastructure was jeopardized at these reservoirs, Upper and Lower Basin States convened an “outside-the-box” working group of water experts to explore strategies and methods to prepare for a potentially continuing drought. This group is not predicting a critical drop in reservoir levels but rather preparing contingency plans if the worst-case hydrology is realized. The goal is to keep contingency plans in the hands of the basin states.

Ted Kowalski and Michelle Garrison presentation: The Colorado River Basin Study (Basin Study) was scenario-based and evaluated an array of potential options. The Basin Study is a good planning tool for Colorado and presents opportunities for continued partnerships. Workgroups came out of the Basin Study that are currently looking at conservation and reuse, agricultural conservation and transfers, and environmental and recreational flows.

Sharing Public Outreach and Participation

Kate McIntire: A large component of the BIP process in identifying future goals and processes is public outreach. Each roundtable has established a public input process unique to its basin and planned several public meetings outside of the typical roundtable meetings that will be hosted at different locations around the basins. The goal of this carefully organized and coordinated outreach effort is to involve stakeholders and the general public during the planning process, as well as continuing outreach efforts and public involvement after the basin plans and Colorado’s Water Plan are drafted. Find more information online at www.coloradowaterplan.com.



Basin Roundtable Outreach Approaches:

- The Arkansas Basin Roundtable has chosen to host their 2014 monthly Roundtable meetings in different locations throughout the basin to encourage a greater level of input in the BIP process.
- The Yampa/White Roundtable conducted four meetings in February, 2014 to garner public interest and input, located in Meeker, Steamboat Springs, Rangely, and Craig.
- The Gunnison Roundtable is planning six public meetings in March/April to review their initial basin plan components, and another six public meetings in May/June when their basin plan is nearly complete.
- The other roundtables all have similar rigorous outreach plans, including public meetings and targeted efforts aimed at involving diverse stakeholders and the general public across each basin.