



UPPER COLORADO
RIVER COMMISSION

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COLORADO

Colorado Water
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Colorado River States Embark on Innovative Water Savings Program

The states of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico have embarked on a unique test program to shore up declining reservoir levels if the 15-year drought that has plagued the Colorado River continues into the future. On July 1, the four states approved 10 projects that allow farmers, municipalities and other water users to voluntarily and temporarily forego use of their water in exchange for compensation. On August 13, 2015, the first agreement was reached on one project within Colorado, in the Yampa River basin.

The states hope that this "forbearance" of water use will supply information that can be used in times of extreme drought as part of a contingency plan to ultimately reduce impacts on Lake Powell, a major Colorado River reservoir located on the Utah-Arizona state line. Lake Powell releases water to Lake Mead for use by the states of Arizona, Nevada, and California and the Republic of Mexico pursuant to an interstate agreement among the seven Colorado River states and a treaty between the United States and Mexico. Lake Powell is also a major producer of hydropower for the Western United States.

"We had a tremendous response from water users in the Upper Colorado River Basin to our request for pilot projects. We are hopeful that these projects will yield valuable information that can be used to develop a long-term program to provide incentives for people to conserve sufficient water to increase the water levels at Lake Powell during times of extreme drought. This will help the four Colorado River states above Lake Powell continue to meet their obligations to Arizona, California and Nevada. It will also protect hydropower generation at the reservoir and the associated revenues that support salinity control as well as endangered fish recovery efforts," said Don Ostler, Executive Director of the Upper Colorado River Commission, the interstate entity that is overseeing the implementation of the projects.

"Better understanding our water management tools affords us greater control over our own water future," said James Eklund, Director of the Colorado Water Conservation Board and Colorado's Commissioner on the Upper Colorado River Commission.

The 10 projects, five in Colorado and five in Wyoming, will be funded for one or more years, at a total cost of roughly \$1 million. This program is part of a larger \$11 million Pilot System Conservation Program involving all seven Colorado River states. Denver Water, Southern Nevada Water Authority, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and Central Arizona Water Conservation District, together with the United States Bureau of Reclamation, are funding the Pilot System Conservation Program. Additional projects will be solicited beginning in fall 2015.

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