

**Citizens for a Healthy Fort Collins * Clean Energy Action * Clean Water Action
Earthjustice * Earth Works Action * Environment Colorado
Frack Free Colorado * Fractivist.com * Plains Alliance for Clean Air and Water
Rocky Mountain Wild * San Juan Citizens Alliance * Save Chatfield
Save The Colorado River Campaign * Save The Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper
Sheep Mountain Alliance * Sierra Club – Poudre Canyon Group
The Environmental Group * Wild Earth Guardians**

February 11, 2014

**TO: Governor John Hickenlooper, Colorado Water Conservation Board, and the
Interbasin Compact Committee**

**RE: Input to the “Colorado Water Plan” from organizations that support the health of
Colorado’s rivers**

The Colorado Water Plan: “Healthy Watersheds, Rivers and Streams, and Wildlife”

Overview

Colorado’s rivers do more than support our communities and industries; they are the lifeblood of the state, providing water and habitat for thousands of species of fish, wildlife and plants. Unfortunately, over the last 100 years, we have over-exploited these irreplaceable resources, using them as tools for growth and profit, much to the detriment of the natural systems that depend on them and of the rivers themselves. Most of Colorado’s rivers are extremely imperiled, diverted and diminished – some are at times drained completely dry. Some of the worst damage has been done to rivers on which new water diversion projects are proposed including the Cache la Poudre, the Fraser, the Upper Colorado, and the South Platte.

As we move forward in the 21st century, the damage we have done to our rivers will be exacerbated by climate change. River flows are expected to plunge in the coming years – 10 to 30 percent or more on the Colorado River by 2050 – as our climate grows warmer and snowpack regimes are disrupted. What will happen to our rivers and the life that they support if we are already diverting all of the flows that we can?

In addition, an increasing amount of water is diverted, and planned for diversion, out of Colorado's rivers for the oil and gas industry's hydraulic fracturing or fracking process. Water used for fracking – which may be taken from municipal and industrial supplies developed and treated to drinking water standards – is polluted with a range of toxic chemicals and typically disposed of through deep underground injection or evaporation. Municipal and industrial participants in proposed new dam/reservoir/pipeline projects including the Seaman Project, Bellvue Pipeline, Northern Integrated Supply Project, and Windy Gap Firming Project are all selling water for fracking. This booming, non-traditional use of our most precious resource is further degrading our rivers and shows no signs of slowing.

It is time to restore our state's rivers to thriving ecological health and strike a balance in river management and water supply planning in Colorado. The new "Colorado Water Plan" provides an excellent opportunity to achieve the twin goals of health and balance for the rivers across our state.

We are encouraged that Governor Hickenlooper's Executive Order of May 13, 2013 (D2013-005), recognized the importance of these values and called for a Colorado Water Plan that would provide: **"A strong environment that includes healthy watersheds, rivers and streams, and wildlife."** The "Actions" we outline below can be coordinated with the other values stated in the Executive Order to bring this vision to life.

Actions

A. Healthy Alternative Water Supply: The Colorado Water Plan should focus on making sure every drop of water that is currently diverted out of the public's rivers is not wasted and is used as efficiently as possible in municipal, industrial and agricultural sectors. This approach will eliminate the need for new river diversion projects and build more resilient communities. Colorado can achieve Healthy Alternative Water Supply systems by implementing:

- Significant increases in water conservation in all sectors.
- Significant reductions in lawn watering and significant increases in landscape retrofits towards low-water plantings.
- Municipal and industrial wastewater reuse and recycling.
- Municipal water and wastewater metering, tiered pricing, and leak detection and repair.
- Municipal stormwater capture, recycling, and reuse.
- Growth, land use planning, and zoning that minimizes water use.
- Modernizing the agricultural sector to focus on water and irrigation efficiency and reuse.

- Water sharing agreements between cities and farms.
- Federal, state, and local funding mechanisms that re-purpose funds currently allocated for proposed diversion-based projects and identify additional funding streams for these healthy alternative water supply systems.

B. No New Diversions: The Colorado Water Plan should meet future water supply needs without proposing any additional diversions from Colorado's rivers. We need to learn to live with what we have already taken.

All currently proposed water supply projects that depend on additional diversions from Colorado's rivers should be placed on hold while Healthy Alternative Water Supply systems are developed and implemented. This includes the seven extremely controversial projects currently winding through federal and state permitting processes – the Halligan Project, Seaman Project, Bellvue Pipeline, Northern Integrated Supply Project, Windy Gap Firming Project, Moffat Project, and Chatfield Project. These proposed projects are estimated to cost a total of \$2 - \$3 billion which could be better spent on a sustainable, non-diversionary future. The rivers imperiled by these projects – the Cache la Poudre, Fraser, Upper Colorado, and South Platte – are already unhealthy and wildly out of balance, with around 50% or more of their waters diverted. These rivers cannot survive further degradation.

C. River Restoration: The May 13, 2013 Executive Order called for a “strong environment that includes healthy watersheds, rivers and streams, and wildlife.” That goal can only be achieved by taking action to reverse past damage to our rivers. Accordingly, as part of the Colorado Water Plan process, Colorado should perform a detailed scientific analysis of each river in the state. Ecosystem health should be evaluated, hydrology should be compared to natural flows, and the extent of degradation of each river should be quantified. The Colorado Water Plan should then determine the amount and timing of flow that needs to be restored to each segment to bring that river ecosystem back to health. The Plan should prioritize the identified needs and prepare an action plan for how this restoration will occur with concrete timelines, management, legal, and financial requirements.

Conclusion

Colorado's rivers – the literal lifeblood of our state – have no voice in their management other than what we give to them. Indeed, these rivers and the water in them belong to the public and it is the job of all citizens and public officials to be the best possible stewards of this resource. We must all ensure that their ecological health is protected for future generations and the environment. The Colorado Water Plan should enable that stewardship and guide the state towards healthy watersheds, rivers and streams, and wildlife. As organizations that

support healthy river systems, we pledge to protect Colorado's rivers for the future and call on you to do the same.

Respectfully,

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Gene Reetz, Save Chatfield

Gary Wockner, Save The Colorado River Campaign

Mark Easter, Save The Poudre: Poudre Waterkeeper

Hilary Cooper, Sheep Mountain Alliance

Will Walters, Sierra Club – Poudre Canyon Group

Chris Garre, The Environmental Group

Jen Pelz, WildEarth Guardians