



WESTERN RESOURCE
ADVOCATES

For Immediate Release

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**Coalition Praises Decision to Terminate Oil Shale Water Rights:
Decision Upholds Agricultural Traditions and Healthy Rivers**

(Boulder, CO) – Today Western Resource Advocates (WRA), a regional conservation organization, and Joe Livingston, a rancher and business owner living in the Big Beaver Creek Valley above Meeker, Colorado, praised the court's decision to terminate the Yellow Jacket Water Conservancy District's water rights.

Background: On July 1, 2011, a water judge in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, terminated the Yellow Jacket Water Conservancy District's conditional water rights to three reservoirs that would have stored approximately 140,000 acre-feet per year in the White River basin above Meeker, Colorado. Prior to the Judge's ruling, the District voluntarily dismissed an application for another 105,000 acre-foot reservoir on the mainstream of the White River. Combined, these reservoirs would have stored roughly the same amount of water Denver Water provides to its 1.3 million customers annually.

WRA, Mr. Livingston, and other local landowners opposed these water rights which, according to Colorado Water Conservation Board records, would have mostly supported oil shale development. At stake in this challenge is our western heritage – rural, agricultural communities, clean air and clean water – and community values central to diverse economies. This decision upholds the rural character of Rangely and Meeker, and benefits the residents of Rio Blanco County. WRA and Joe Livingston supported the use of these rights for agricultural purposes, but challenged using most of the water for oil shale development as inconsistent with the rural nature of the valley.

The Yellow Jacket Water Conservancy District's plan is just one of the significant undeveloped water projects for oil shale identified in WRA's 2009 report, *Water on the Rocks*. In a groundbreaking study, WRA catalogued all the water rights that have been acquired by oil shale interests, or could be used by them, to develop oil shale on a

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commercial scale. Despite this decision, the volume of the water rights for oil shale remains enormous.

(For a copy of *Water on the Rocks* go to:
<http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org/land/wotrreport/index.php>)

Statements:

Joe Livingston: “I am a local rancher and business owner who cares deeply about the quality of our rural landscapes and our communities. Flooding our valley for oil shale development would have been a huge mistake for what is a hidden gem in Colorado.”

Robert K. Harris: “This decision is a victory for our rural heritage. Protecting clean air, clean water, and West Slope residents who would be most impacted by oil shale development remains vital as we plan Colorado’s water future. Local landowners showed their power by standing up and challenging projects that would use large quantities of Colorado’s water for oil shale development. Diverting water from agriculture and other critical uses would have a huge impact on the quality of life in the valley. While industry and oil shale proponents argue oil shale development would not require large quantities of water, Yellow Jacket’s and others’ attempts to retain vast quantities of water for oil shale development suggests that full scale development could require staggering amounts of water.”

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Western Resource Advocates is a regional non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protecting the West’s land, air and water. Visit us online at www.westernresourceadvocates.org.