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## **WATER USE EFFICIENCY TESTIMONY OUTLINES SOLUTIONS TO DROUGHT AND BEYOND**

**Water use efficiency is best way for Front Range to meet  
increase in water needs, local expert says.**

**Denver, CO—** Speaking before the Colorado General Assembly's Water Resources Review Committee today, local water issues expert Bruce Driver testified that the Denver Metro area could gain 5 times the amount of additional water it will need by 2045 through efficiency measures alone. Driver, who is the Executive Director of the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies, noted that water use efficiency is usually less expensive and less environmentally damaging than building large new dams. He urged the Committee to plan for efficiency measures that would meet the state's future water needs in a manner that could allow both continued growth and quality of life.

Countering claims that Denver has already "maxxed out" on conservation options, Driver highlighted several untapped areas where Front Range communities can save water at almost no cost to residents. "Water use efficiency," he said, "does not mean brown or dead lawns. Brown lawns are what we have to live with these days, in part because we have not invested sufficiently in water use efficiency in the past."

Instead, Driver explained, water use efficiency includes a constellation of "demand-side" measures—such as xeriscaping and more efficient water-using appliances—and "supply-side" measures—such as using groundwater and surface water in tandem, making dry-year leasing arrangements with farmers, fixing leaks, and re-using treated effluent. Taken together, these measures could produce at least 500,000 acre-feet per year for the Denver area. Absent these measures, Denver is expected to face a water shortfall of 75,000 to 114,000 acre-feet by 2045; the amount recouped by efficiency could compensate for this shortfall by a factor of 5.

Some of the solutions Driver highlighted included:

- Replacing bluegrass with lawns that are 50%-100% xeriscaped: 80,000 to 160,000 acre-feet per year. Driver noted that during the current drought, yards planted with arid-climate plants have been the most lush and colorful.
- Replacing inefficient water-using appliances and plumbing fixtures: up to 100,000 acre-feet per year.
- Coordinating existing surface supplies with groundwater supplies: 30,000 acre-feet per year.

- Dry-year leases, where Metro communities buy water from farmers during drought periods: 190,000 acre-feet per year.
- Reusing treated effluent: 120,000 to 500,000 acre-feet per year.
- Integrating systems among Denver water providers: 20,000 acre-feet per year.
- Repairs and improvements to existing dams: up to 142,000 acre-feet per year.

Driver noted that some of these solutions might entail building small dams.

There is much the Front Range could do to catch up with other metropolitan areas, such as El Paso and Santa Fe, that appear to do a better job of saving water, Driver said, citing comprehensive research by the Land and Water Fund comparing water use practices among the metropolitan regions of the Interior West. Successful strategies include creating rate structures that penalize heavy users and reward conservative ones, and offering incentives to replace bluegrass with climate-appropriate plants.

In light of the high cost of building large new dams, both economically and environmentally, Driver asserted that the state must investigate efficiency. "It's incumbent on the legislature to seek low-cost, environmentally safe solutions," he said. He outlined several possible legislative paths for addressing water efficiency:

- ✓ Clarify when and under what conditions dry-year leasing is acceptable in Colorado, with the goal of providing security to irrigators and other users. This measure alone could generate up to 190,000 acre-feet per year.
- ✓ Require urban water providers above a certain size to implement (1) inverted water rate structures that communicate clearly to their customers the cost and scarcity of water use as they increase their consumption and (2) rebate programs to encourage turf replacement and purchase of low-water use appliances. This legislation might generate 100,000 acre-feet per year or more.
- ✓ Specify that water providers seeking state funding or bonding for dams and pipelines must first show that these projects are necessary in light of the potential for water use efficiency.

Projects backed by taxpayer revenue or state bonds that are not weighed against possible efficiency measures are simply irresponsible, Driver said. He urged the Committee to consider lowest-cost solutions first, especially in light of the additional testimony it received today.

Other speakers at the Committee hearing today included CU Law Professor David Getches, who proposed a state-wide water resource planning process, and John Morris, who spoke on the ecological and environmental costs of dams and pipelines.

Driver's complete written testimony is available by calling the Land and Water Fund, or on its website: [http://www.lawfund.org/media/pdf/Efficiency\\_testimony.pdf](http://www.lawfund.org/media/pdf/Efficiency_testimony.pdf)