



WESTERN RESOURCE ADVOCATES

For Immediate Release:

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Western Resource Advocates Releases Report Quantifying Oil Shale Water Rights

BOULDER, CO – Western Resource Advocates (WRA) released its report, “Water on the Rocks: Oil Shale Water Rights in Colorado,” that quantifies the water rights that oil companies have established in western Colorado. The report sheds light on the large volume of water already in the hands of oil shale development interests and warns of the problems that commercial oil shale extraction could cause for Colorado communities, farmers, ranchers, and western rivers.

The “Water on the Rocks” report calls on leaders to carefully consider the full impacts of commercial oil shale development before making decisions. Hundreds of oil shale water rights, totaling almost 2 million acre-feet of stored water and over 11,000cfs of diversions, pepper Colorado’s western river basins and pose challenges to Colorado and other downstream states if these rights are put into use.

“Large scale commercial oil shale development would harm both West Slope and Front Range communities,” said Karin P. Sheldon, WRA’s executive director, “A shift of water to oil shale will dramatically change the landscape in the areas developed. It could mean an end to agriculture and to the historic economic base of these rural communities.”

“Water on the Rocks” is the first report to thoroughly catalogue how much of Colorado’s water is already in the possession of the oil shale industry. The report:

- Identifies all major water rights energy companies have targeted for oil shale development in Colorado.
- Projects likely water requirements associated with oil shale development based on anticipated technologies.

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- Analyzes the legal and hydrological issues affecting development of Colorado's water allocation under the 1922 Colorado River Compact and 1948 Upper Basin Compact.
- Explains how the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program affects and limits additional uses of water on the Colorado River.

“Water on the Rocks” reaches the following conclusions:

Commercial oil shale development would transform western Colorado. Oil shale development would transfer water presently used for agriculture to oil shale production. Agricultural lands would be dried-up and thousands of acres would be transformed into industrial landscapes.

Oil shale development in western Colorado would affect Colorado's Front Range communities. Front Range water providers and the Colorado River Water Conservation District agree that oil shale development may challenge existing water projects and compromise development of future supplies.

Oil shale will accelerate climate change, further stressing water availability. Huge quantities of greenhouse gas emissions caused by oil shale extraction would pose a serious threat to the climate of an already dry region.

Total water demands must be clearly understood before committing to commercial oil shale development. Estimates point out that it will require 1 to 4 barrels of water to produce one barrel of oil from shale.

The sources and quantity of the energy required to extract oil shale must be identified before development is pursued. Initial estimates indicate that it will require 10 new power plants and 5 new coal mines to produce one million barrels of shale oil per day.

“Despite a significant investment, industry remains years away from establishing the economic viability, technical efficiency, and environmental performance of the technologies,” said David Abelson, Western Resource Advocates oil shale policy advisor. “It is vital that policy makers understand the water, economic, and environmental impacts before committing to a commercial development program.”

To read the report and view maps of where these water rights are located, click on www.westernresourceadvocates.com/land/wotrreport/index.php.