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COALITION CALLS FOR SOUND, COLLABORATIVE POLICIES TO BOOST WATER SUPPLIES

As Ref A Goes Down, Groups Highlight Better Solutions to Water Deficits

Denver, CO—In the wake of Referendum A's defeat, a coalition of groups working on sustainable water planning for Colorado's future pointed to a host of faster, cheaper solutions to Colorado's projected urban water shortfalls. These include smart storage, dam repair, and conservation and efficiency measures not yet tapped or under consideration by Front Range water providers.

Referendum A would have allowed up to \$4 Billion in financing for unspecified dams and other water storage projects. The referendum was seen as pitting Western Slope communities against Front Range water consumers and as a blank check for unspecified water projects. A diverse, bipartisan network of farmers, ranchers, government officials, policy experts, and conservationists opposed the measure. However, that same network is deeply concerned with finding solutions to water shortfalls.

"We especially share the concerns of south-metro area residents about water shortfalls there," said Elise Jones, Executive Director of the Colorado Environmental Coalition. "We're looking forward to the South-Metropolitan Water Supply Study, which should point to a host of solutions and will provide a framework for moving forward. Obviously, better planning for growth would go a long way toward solving some of our apparent water problems."

Some of the information needed for that planning effort is newly available, according to Bart Miller, Water Program Director at Western Resource Advocates. "We've analyzed water efficiency and conservation issues in urban areas across the Southwest," he said. "Our Smart Water report, slated for release December 9, shows that overall water use in the Denver metropolitan area appears inefficient compared to cities located in drier climates. We project that the Denver metro area could save just through better conservation and efficiency. These measures include fixing water providers' leaks, providing incentives for Xeriscaping and efficient appliances, and adjusting water rate structures to reward conservation-minded households."

Water efficiency measures that get more out of existing supplies are part of the solution, agreed Melinda Kassen, Director of Trout Unlimited's Western Water Project. "The legislature could make it easier to create "Smart Supplies" and "Smart Storage" options. They could do more in three areas: provide protection and compensation to basins facing water exports, pass efficiency legislation, and provide for more creative problem-solving. For example, current law allows for leasing agreements between farmers and city water providers only during governor-declared emergencies, but it might be useful to look at ways to expand these arrangements in a way that protects agricultural water rights."

"There are a number of water projects already moving through the process," added David Nickum, also of Trout Unlimited. "It's clear that the water providers realize that they need to bring all stakeholders to the table. We intend to stay involved to ensure that these projects can meet a genuine need without causing too much harm to the environment."

"The environmental community will help develop real solutions to Colorado's water problems," said Carrie Doyle, of the League of Conservation Voters' Education Fund. "Colorado can successfully provide for its future water needs by considering specific projects on their merits, including all stakeholders at the table, and providing protections for our environment and local economies."

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