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House Rejects Urban Water Conservation and Efficiency

SB 87 was only comprehensive bill addressing urban water planning

Denver, CO—The last comprehensive water planning bill died in the House Local Government Committee today, after passing the full Senate last Friday.

A coalition of groups working on sustainable water planning for Colorado's future expressed great disappointment with the House's failure to act on the most cost-effective solution to the drought and long-term water planning. Sponsored by Senator Doug Linkhart in the Senate, the bill grew to have broad support from senators across the state.

The bill met an untimely fate in the House. "The legislature just couldn't get it right today," said Sponsor Representative Andrew Romanoff. "It felt like Goldilocks. Some on the Committee said the bill went too far and others said it didn't go far enough."

"It's a big disappointment the legislature refused to pass such a reasonable measure to improve Colorado's water future," said Bart Miller, Water Program Director at the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies. "Improving efficiency is the cheapest, fastest, and least damaging way to meet our urban water needs. We need to put efficiency first."

While the bill would not have ruled out the construction of new dams and diversion projects, Miller explained, it would have had large urban water providers consider setting water use targets through a host of efficiency measures prior to receiving financial assistance from the State to fund new dams, pipelines, or other water development projects. "The bill amended the 1991 Conservation Act with key new provisions, including ways to inform customers about simple ways not to waste water. The state's population and water demand are much bigger than a dozen years ago. We simply need to re-assess how to make better use of existing water supplies."

"Senate Bill 87 was just common-sense planning for our future," said Elise Jones, Executive Director of the Colorado Environmental Coalition. "It just doesn't make sense that the legislature may adjourn without having passed any measure on conservation or efficiency, key elements for moving forward."

Specifically, SB 87 would have:

- Made it state policy to maximize the efficient use of existing supplies

- Required large water providers to develop water efficiency plans by 2005
- Had providers consider all water saving measures in the 1991 Water Conservation Act (including incentive-based conservation measures like rebates for turf replacement and indoor appliance retrofits, water rate structures, and other measures), as well as the following new elements:
 - ✓ Dry-year leasing of water from local irrigators
 - ✓ Coordination between surface and groundwater supplies
 - ✓ System integration with other providers
 - ✓ Best management practices for commercial and industrial users

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