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Contact: Senator Doug Linkhart, 303 866 4861
Bart Miller, Land and Water Fund, 303 444 1188 x219
Elise Jones, Colorado Environmental Coalition, 303-534-7066

WATER EFFICIENCY BILL PASSES COMMITTEE

SB 87 is only surviving bill to address efficiency; faces lively floor debate

Denver, CO—A coalition of groups working on sustainable water planning for Colorado's future hailed Senate Bill 87's passage through the Appropriations Committee today. Sponsored by Senator Doug Linkhart, the bill sets water use efficiency targets for the state's largest water suppliers. It may be hotly debated on the Senate floor as early as Monday.

"This bill is our last real chance to establish efficiency practices that will carry our state into the future," said Senator Doug Linkhart. "The drought has not gone away, and it is very important that we address our long-term water needs in a comprehensive way."

"This bill puts efficiency first," said Bart Miller, Water Program Director at the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies. "Because efficiency is the cheapest, fastest, and least damaging way to secure additional long-term water supplies, we simply can't afford to drop the ball on this legislation."

While the bill would not rule out the construction of new dams and diversion projects, Miller explained that it would establish targets for urban water efficiency, requiring efficiency plans to be completed before water providers could receive financial assistance from the State to build new dams, pipelines, or other water development projects. "The bill amends the 1991 Water Conservation Act to set specific goals for water efficiency planning," Miller said. "It lists many conservation and efficiency options for water planners to consider and directs major water providers to inform customers about easy ways to prevent water waste."

"Senate Bill 87 is Colorado's last shot at common-sense planning for our water future," said Elise Jones, Executive Director of the Colorado Environmental Coalition. Jones noted that other bills focused on conservation had died in committee, leaving SB 87 as the only comprehensive bill still facing legislative action. "Increasing our water-use efficiency is simply the most cost-effective solution to the ongoing drought," Jones said. "Lawmakers will be shirking their responsibility if they fail to pass a bill like SB 87 to ensure wiser water use and provide immediate relief from the current drought."

Specifically, SB 87 would:

- Make it a state policy to maximize the efficient use of existing water supplies
- Require large water providers to develop urban water use efficiency plans by 2005
- Require these plans to consider all water-saving measures listed in the 1991 Water Conservation Act (including incentives-based conservation measures, water rate structures, and other measures) as well as the following new elements:
 - Dry-year leasing and other interruptible supply measures

- Coordination between surface and groundwater supplies
 - System integration among water providers
 - Best management practices for commercial and industrial users
- Require water providers to have efficiency plans meeting the above criteria before receiving financial assistance (such as tax revenues or state-backed bonds) for new dams or other water projects
- Require large water providers to educate citizens on outdoor water use efficiency, discourage inefficient practices, and prohibit new covenants that disallow drought-tolerant landscapes