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LINKHART BILL MAXIMIZES URBAN WATER EFFICIENCY, HAS BROAD SUPPORT

SB 87 Backed by Diverse Interests

Denver, CO—A bill up for a vote in Senate committee Wednesday morning takes a realistic approach to tackling Colorado's drought dilemmas, its proponents said today. The legislation outlines a path to increase water use efficiency by large water providers, making efficiency planning the first priority in obtaining new sources of water. The bill's common-sense approach has earned the support of a broad range of interests, including the Colorado Water Congress, Colorado River Conservation District, Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, Land and Water Fund of the Rockies, League of Women Voters, Sierra Club, Trout Unlimited, Colorado Environmental Coalition, and many other groups.

"This bill declares it a state policy to maximize the efficient use of existing water supplies," said Senator Doug Linkhart. "This bill puts efficiency first. It is just what we need to deal with this drought and Colorado's long-term water future."

While the bill would not rule out the construction of new dams and diversion projects, Linkhart explained that it would establish targets for urban water efficiency through a planning process to be carried out 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," Linkhart said. "It spells out a host of conservation and efficiency measures for water plans to consider and directs major water providers to inform customers about easy ways to prevent water waste."

"This is a common-sense approach to getting more out of the water we already have," said Bart Miller, Water Program Director for the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies. "That's why the bill has gained such broad support. Big new dams are very expensive compared to maximizing our existing water supplies. This bill doesn't rule out new supplies, but it requires providers to do their homework first. In our current fiscal climate, we must stretch each dollar farther and make better use of each drop of water."

"Senate Bill 87 is Colorado's last shot at common-sense planning for our water future," said Elise Jones, 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. "We're likely to face another dry summer this year. It just makes sense to invest in efficiency today."

Specifically, SB 87 would:

- Make it a state policy to maximize the efficient use of existing water supplies
- Require large water providers (those with drinking water deliveries higher than 2000 acre-feet/year) 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
- Provide state funding for technical assistance and grants to complete water efficiency plans.