

Colorado River Water Deal Reached

By Kirk Siegler



State Bridge, CO. Colorado State Highway 131 as it crosses over the Colorado River in Eagle County
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Colorado's largest water utility has signed a truce with western slope water agencies and governments over its future use of the stressed Upper Colorado River. The agreement inked Tuesday in Grand County is being billed as historic.



Grand County Commissioner James Newberry

"This agreement solidifies and shows a new way of doing water business in Colorado," said Grand County Commissioner James Newberry.

Commissioner Newberry spoke at a signing ceremony in Hot Sulphur Springs that included Governor John Hickenlooper, the head of the Colorado River District and others.

Under the deal, Denver Water is agreeing to implement a number of environmental initiatives that will mitigate the impacts of so-called trans-mountain diversions that take water from the Upper Colorado River and its tributaries to feed Denver and its thirsty suburbs. In exchange, western slope agencies won't litigate one of the Denver's planned expansion projects; the so called Moffat firming plan.

Trans-mountain diversions have been happening in Colorado for almost a century. They're how millions living along the populous Front Range get most of their water. But they've come under increased scrutiny lately as agencies like Denver and Northern Water have proposed to increase the amount they're diverting.

As the Associated Press reported, the unofficial treaty of sorts is seen as a big deal because of Colorado's complicated water law and a century's worth of mistrust between water-rich western Colorado and communities along the arid eastern plains.

At the ceremony, Governor Hickenlooper joked that water wars are starting to be scaled back to "rubber bullets and bean bag shot guns." He also said a "truce" like this carried special significance in dry years like this.

Meanwhile, the deal on the Colorado River was announced on the same day that the environmental group American Rivers listed the nearby Green River as the nation's second most threatened waterway.

KUNC 91.5

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