

Grand County Entities Sign Historic Water Agreement

May 15, 2012 – Gov. John Hickenlooper will attend the signing of a historic water agreement at the Grand County Administration Center in Hot Sulphur Springs on Tuesday, May 15th. Grand County, Summit County and Clinton Ditch & Reservoir Company representatives plan to sign the Colorado River Cooperative Agreement at high noon. Representatives from the Colorado River Water Conservation District and Middle Park Water Conservancy District, entities that helped lead the effort, will also attend. Six years in the making, the agreement between Denver Water and 35 Western Slope water providers, local governments and ski resort operators ensures statewide cooperation on Colorado River water issues and is the broadest in scope of its kind in state history.

The document with attachments is available on the Grand County website at www.co.grand.co.us. Focused on cooperation, the proposed agreement brings parties who traditionally have been at odds together as partners on a path to responsible water development and management benefitting both the East and West Slopes. It achieves better environmental health for the Colorado River Basin, maintains high-quality recreational use, and improves economics for many cities, counties and businesses impacted by the river. Starting with Eagle County, the proposed agreement is now being signed by other entities from the headwaters to the Utah state line.

"This cooperative effort represents a new way of doing business when it comes to water," said Gov. John Hickenlooper during the April 28, 2011, announcement of the agreement. "It shows that water solutions must be crafted from a statewide perspective. We hope and expect that this process will ripple across Colorado to other areas of water conflict."

With 35 partners stretching from Grand Junction to the Denver metro area, the proposed agreement is the largest of its kind in the history of the state. Taken as a whole, this landmark agreement marks the most significant change Colorado has seen in how the state's water resources are managed.

The Grand County Board of County Commissioners' goal during negotiations was to secure enhancement and protection for the environment and Grand County's water resources for today as well as the future. "We have to be better tomorrow than we are today if we accept the agreement" was the direction of the Grand County Board of County Commissioners. This agreement will provide water during low-flow periods and establish an ongoing process and partnership for determining how to best manage the water resources in the future.

"This all comes down to the health of the Colorado River Basin for us," said Eric Kuhn, general manager of the Colorado River District. "I believe we can all agree that, in the end, the Colorado River and many of its tributaries will be healthier under the terms of the proposed agreement than it is today."

The comprehensive proposed agreement focuses on enhancing the environmental health of much of the Colorado River Basin and its tributaries, as well as supporting many West Slope cities, towns, counties and water providers as they work to improve the quality and quantity of water through new municipal water projects and river management initiatives.

In exchange for environmental enhancements, including financial support for municipal water projects and providing additional water supply to Grand County and other West Slope partners, Denver Water has restricted its service area and its ability to return to the West Slope in the future for water diversions. The agreement has signatories agreeing not to object to the issuance of a permit for Denver Water's Moffat Collection System Project.

However, the agreement is not a substitute or replacement for mitigation for the project. The agreement provides enhancements which are separate from and in addition to any required mitigation. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers is the lead federal agency on the Moffat project. It has yet to issue the final environmental impact (FEIS) statement which will include mitigation.

Grand County Commissioner James Newberry said, "The specifics of the proposal have been a long time in the making, but we believe they represent the best opportunity to improve the health of the Fraser and Colorado rivers, the economy of our county, and provide additional water for community and recreational use."

The Colorado River Cooperative Agreement also establishes a process, dubbed "Learning by Doing," by which Denver Water, Grand County, the Colorado River District, the Middle Park Water Conservancy District, Colorado Parks & Recreation and Trout Unlimited will use the flexibility in Denver Water's water system enhancement and resources to manage flows for the benefit of the environment in Grand County.

For more information, please contact the Grand County Commissioners at 970-725-3347.

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