

## **Businesses, Farmers, Environmentalists, Latinos Take Issue With Colorado Basin Study, Warn Some Conclusions Are Flawed, Relied On Inflated Data**

DENVER, CO – The much-anticipated [Colorado River Basin Water Supply & Demand Study](#) was rigged by Colorado River basin states and utilities to support costly, unrealistic, and outdated solutions, according to local businesses, farmers, environmentalists, and Latinos. The study's critics, who are members of [Protect the Flows](#), [National Young Farmers' Coalition](#), [Nuestro Rio](#) and [Save the Colorado](#) point to states and utilities providing inflated water demand numbers which make some of the study's conclusions fundamentally flawed.

Funded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and seven Western states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), the CRBS is the culmination of a two-year-long effort to consider future demand and supply scenarios in the Colorado River Basin and is intended to recommend options and strategies for meeting the water needs of a growing population.

Yet the study is said to present inflated future demand forecasts based on pre-recession population growth estimates and assumptions. Indeed, Colorado's 2015 demands assume exports from the Colorado River at nearly 750,000 Acre Feet (AF) per year, when in fact the average is closer to 550,000 AF per year.

Similarly, Arizona provided projections made in 2006, based on 2005 populations; however, these projections overestimated Arizona's 2010 population by more than 600,000 people relative to the census. As early as 2015, the Basin Study population projection is already more than one million people too high.

In Nevada, the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) provided 2008 Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) population projections, which projected the SNWA service area population for 2015 at 2.56 million. In reality, this number is 0.52 million higher (roughly 20%) than the 2012 CBER projection. By 2060, the difference between the 2008 and 2012 CBER projections grows to 0.988 million people, or a population that's 22% higher than current projections.

This, critics argue, results in major discrepancies between actual demand and projected demand, with the overestimated figures being used to support the need for more drastic measures to augment water supply by desalinating ocean water or shipping in water via new pipelines from states outside the southwest, which would require massive new government expenditures.

“States cooked the books to show higher demand for water consumption to set up a federal bailout on expensive water projects,” said Molly Mugglestone, Director of Protect the Flows. “Meanwhile, the states failed to account for river flow that will be required to sustain our multi-billion dollar recreation economy.”

A [recent Protect the Flows study](#) indicated that recreation on the Colorado River and its tributaries generates \$26 billion annually and supports a quarter million American jobs. While the CRBS incorporated metrics to track environmental and recreation impact and recommended further study on the need for healthy river flows, such flows were not included in the study's demand projections. The demand numbers only included expected water consumption and excluded any accounting of how much water would be needed to keep the river system healthy in the face of dwindling water supply.

The Bureau of Reclamation's cost analysis did reveal that improved municipal conservation, water re-use and agricultural conservation would cost only a quarter as much per acre foot of water yielded as ocean desalination, and one third as much as a proposed new pipeline to stretch from the Missouri River across nearly 800 miles from Kansas to Colorado. These were essentially consensus measures that were included in every suite of options or "portfolios" analyzed by the Bureau of Reclamation. However, when applied against an inflated demand scenario, it appears that new "imported" water is needed to fully meet demand.

This distortion enables the states to push for the more expensive "water augmentation" options, such as ocean desalination or a new pipeline from the Missouri River. The study considered the construction of four new ocean desalination plants, which would also require the construction of new power plants, and was estimated to cost billions up front. The Missouri River pipeline was estimated to require billions in initial expenditure to construct. These enormous price tags would inevitably require federal assistance.

"The Bureau of Reclamation should be commended for conducting this study, but the participating states and utilities have shown that they were only interested in advancing their own narrow interests instead of finding realistic and modern ways to balance water consumption with the health of the Colorado River," said Sal Rivera, Arizona Director of Nuestro Rio, a network of Latinos dedicated to preserving the Colorado River.

As the Colorado River irrigates 15 percent of the nation's crops, and this water is projected to become scarcer, Regina Fitzsimmons of National Young Farmers' Coalition called for state and federal governments to embrace improved agricultural efficiency within the Colorado River Basin instead of shipping water from the Missouri River at the expense of other farmers. "Young, organic growers in the basin depend on the health of the Colorado River," said Fitzsimmons, "Instead of pursuing mega projects that may harm growers in other regions, we should help our farmers be part of the solution right here at home."

"It is time for water agencies to turn the page on 19<sup>th</sup> century thinking that myopically drains rivers and public coffers," added Gary Wockner, Director of Save the Colorado, "We need modern management of our water resources to maximize efficiency in water

use in a cost effective manner and protects the river system that defines the American Southwest.”

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