

7-11-2022

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from interim work of the 66th Legislature. On June 27 and 28 in Baggs, I participated in a tour and meeting of Governor Gordon's Colorado River Work Group. Chad Espenscheid and Randy Bolgiano of Sublette County also attended the meeting. As the drought continues to escalate in the western US, the focus on the shortage of water in the Colorado River system will worsen.

A little-known fact in the Green River Valley is that the city of Cheyenne gets 50-60 percent of its water supply out of the Colorado River system. This is accomplished through a complex system of surface water collectors, dams, and pipelines that originate on the west slope of the Sierra Madres mountains south of Rawlins, which is over 100 miles from Cheyenne. Cheyenne gets its water through a trans-basin diversion that moves water from the Colorado River basin to the North Platte River basin. Colorado River water doesn't actually get to Cheyenne; it's just used by the city to "pay back" water to the North Platte system that the city collects in the Snowy Range further upstream. On June 27, we toured the collection system on the west slope of the Sierra Madres, and it is amazing.

If the drought were to worsen on the Colorado River, and the Upper Basin states couldn't deliver 75 million acre-feet over the most recent ten-year period to Lee's Ferry just below Lake Powell, curtailment would occur according to the Colorado River Compact. All water rights post-1922 could be affected by a curtailment. Cheyenne's water supply would be in jeopardy, because its water rights are post-1922. Industry, specifically trona, and other municipalities could also be severely impacted by a curtailment.

On June 28, the Colorado Work Group met to discuss the latest issues on the river. Prior to this meeting, the Secretary of Interior and the Bureau of Reclamation asked the Colorado River Basin states to find 2-4 million acre-feet of water reductions by 2023 in order to keep the levels at Lake Powell and Lake Mead high enough to continue electricity generation, or they, the Feds, would find those reductions. They gave the Basin states 60 days to develop a plan.

The Bureau of Reclamation is the watermaster in the Lower Basin states, but not in the Upper Basin where Wyoming sits. Wyoming controls Wyoming water, unless the flows at Lee's Ferry

are reduced to the point curtailment happens. However, the Bureau of Reclamation has control of flows from Flaming Gorge, Fontenelle, and a few smaller reservoirs in Wyoming, because the Feds built and operate most of those reservoirs. The Upper Basin states are most likely going to offer more releases from reservoirs, but have they no authority to reduce the water use of individual water right holders. Most of our meeting was a discussion of the Bureau of Reclamation's request for 2-4 million acre-feet of water conservation. The other major discussion was what might happen in a curtailment. To date, nothing concrete is known about either topic.

Three things are a concern to me. One, the drought/hydrology continues to worsen in the Colorado River system. Two, the largest city in Wyoming is dependent upon water that could go away in curtailment, and that city has more population than the total population in the Green River Valley. Population holds political power. Three, the Feds are unpredictable.

There is a great article in the Cowboy State Daily on this issue.

<https://cowboystatedaily.com/2022/07/08/in-light-of-historic-drought-feds-tell-wyoming-to-reduce-colorado-river-water-consumption/>

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