

The Subcommittee on Water and Power
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives

Oversight Field Hearing
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Greeley, Colorado

TESTIMONY

Of

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Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee, on behalf of the citizens of Greeley I would like to welcome you to Greeley, Weld County and Colorado. We are honored that you choose Greeley as the location of this hearing.

I would like to start today with a brief history of Greeley and the importance of agriculture to our local economy. Greeley was founded in 1870 as an agricultural temperance colony. The Union Colony, as it was called in 1870, was sponsored by Horace Greeley the famed New York newspaper publisher. The Union Colony was located at the confluence of the South Platte River and the Cache la Poudre River. This location was no accident.

The settlers knew that they would need water to insure that their crops would grow in the “Great American Desert”. To this end the Greeley Irrigation Company was formed thirty days before the formal incorporation of the Union Colony. The company was not only formed, but construction of the first major irrigation canal was also started. This canal is still in use today.

During the drought and the depression of the 1930’s, it was determined that additional water supplies were needed to enable the area to survive. Prominent Greeley citizens championed the idea of bringing Colorado River water from the other side of the mountains to the area. This endeavor became the Colorado Big Thompson Project. This major trans-mountain water diversion project is known and studied world wide. This is a proud part of our water heritage.

Agriculture, particularly irrigated agriculture, has been the economic life blood of Greeley and Weld County for the past 140 years. From sugar beets, to potatoes, to vegetables, to wheat and barley, to corn and hay, to poultry, to beef cattle and dairy cows,

Greeley and Weld County have grown and prospered. Today, Weld County is ranked number 8 in the top 10 counties in the nation in the dollar value of its agricultural products sold. Weld County is the only county in the top 10 that is outside of California.

In 2007, Weld County had agricultural sales of \$1.5 Billion. This is 25% of the total Colorado agricultural sales of \$6.1 Billion. Of the top 10 counties in Colorado, 7 are in the South Platte River Basin. These 7 counties accounted for 62% of the agricultural sales in Colorado in 2007. With the exception of the dry land wheat and sunflowers, this production is dependent upon irrigated farm land.

The future of agriculture is bright for Greeley and Weld County as the Leprino Company is close to starting construction on a new mozzarella cheese factory in Greeley. This plant will add 500 new jobs at build out. In addition to the new jobs, the Leprino plant could result in 50,000 additional dairy cows being added to Weld County to provide milk for the plant. This is in addition to JBS Swift & Co. having their corporate headquarters in Greeley. They are one of the nation's top meat processing companies. Their Weld County facilities include a major meat processing plant and two large cattle feedlots. This bright future is tied to irrigated agriculture as our past has been.

I would now like to address the first question of the May 6, 2010 invitation letter to testify at this hearing. I share with you the key findings of a 2009 Consumptive Needs Assessment conducted by the South Platte Basin Roundtable (SPBRT). This Roundtable is one of nine across the state formed by the Colorado Water for the 21st Century Act. This Needs Assessment illustrates the water supply challenges facing both municipal water providers and agricultural water users. A full copy of the Needs Assessment has been submitted for the record. I also would like to point out that this Needs Assessment does not include the Denver Metro Area. There is a separate Roundtable for the Denver Metro Area and they have conducted their own needs assessment. Again, the numbers I am going to share with you do not include the Denver Metro Area.

The Roundtable looked at agricultural water needs through 2030. It was found that there is currently a water deficit (shortage) on irrigated lands of around 257,000 acre-feet. It is estimated that that an additional 157,000 acres of land will be dried up by 2030. This will reduce the agricultural water deficit to around 210,000 acre-ft. The important point here is that agriculture could use more water to fully utilize the existing farm ground.

As part of the Consumptive Needs Assessment, the Roundtable evaluated key factors that are influencing water supply. The conclusions reached are as follows:

1. There is significant competition for existing water supplies including competition from the Denver Metro Area.
2. There will be increasing reuse of legally reusable water by municipalities. This will leave less water in the river.
3. Water conservation by municipalities will help reduce future water demands but will not alone be sufficient to meet future demands.

4. There is little or no water left to develop in the Basin.

The State of Colorado has performed a study of 2050 Water Demands. This study was used in the Consumptive Needs Assessment by the SPBRT. The State study looked at a range of water demand including low, medium, and high. For the South Platte River Basin Roundtable area the 2050 mid range municipal demand was an increase of 247,000 acre-feet over 2008 levels. As a point of comparison, the Colorado Big Thompson Project (CBT) has an average annual yield of 213,000 acre-feet. To meet our 2050 mid range municipal water demand, we will need more than another CBT project.

The challenge is how to meet the increased municipal demand without devastating irrigated agriculture. There is no one single solution that will be able to meet all the 2050 demand. The current strategy is that it will take a portfolio of supply options. The most probable are:

1. Municipal water conservation and reuse.
2. Development of water from the Colorado River.
3. Construction of new storage reservoirs.
4. Conversion of agricultural water to municipal use.

There are currently three major storage projects in the Basin area that are in the federal permitting process. These three projects, when built, will provide a total of 90,000 acre-feet of annual yield. This is 36% of the total projected 2050 mid range increase in municipal demand. If these storage projects are not built, this 90,000 acre-foot water will most likely come out of irrigated agriculture. This will cause significant economic, social, and environmental damage to the Basin and the State as a result of this transfer. Unfortunately, there is opposition to all three of the major storage projects. As a result, the certainty of obtaining the needed federal permits is still in question.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing the following points:

1. Irrigated agriculture is and has been key part of our economy for 140 years.
2. Urban growth is creating water supply challenges for both municipalities and agriculture.
3. Minimizing the loss of irrigated farm land is vitally important to our area.
4. It will take a portfolio approach to meet our future water supply needs. No one single approach will provide the water needed.
5. The construction of new storage is absolutely critical to meeting our future water supply needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee today. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have concerning my testimony.

Submitted: May 13, 2010

By: *Harold G. Evans*

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