



August 31, 2023

Dear Task Force members,

Thank you for your willingness to serve on this important task force. Water policy has been and will continue to be one of the most dynamic and important issues facing Colorado. We appreciate the historical knowledge that the members of this task force bring to the table and the diverse set of viewpoints represented. We wish to be a source of information from the agricultural industry as you engage in these important discussions.

Colorado's diverse agriculture industry is the 2nd largest contributor to the state's economy, with over \$20 Billion annually. The economic contribution doubles to \$40 billion annually when you include the food industry. Colorado's agricultural community supports more than 170,000 jobs and more than half of counties in Colorado are "ag dependent" with one in every ten jobs being tied to the industry. Colorado's hard-working farm and ranch families help feed the nation, supports wildlife, protects the environment, supports rural communities, and is helping build new energy economy.

Water is the lifeblood of agriculture and more than 80% of the consumptive use of water in the state is directly tied to farming and ranching. It is important to note that agricultural water use is most often not the last use of the water, with return flows stemming from agricultural irrigation allowing for additional beneficial uses as the water moves through the system. To that end, irrigated agriculture, through the historic doctrine of prior appropriation, provides wildlife habitat and important wildlife corridors, vibrant riparian systems, and healthy watersheds.

As an important partner in these discussions, we have developed a set of guiding principles that we encourage the Task Force to keep in mind. Our primary focus is to protect the agricultural industry to ensure a viable future for our farm and ranch families that are the backbone of our communities throughout the state.

Guiding Principles:

- Do no harm. Any proposal must protect private property rights and should protect the ability of the agriculture community to continue production in a profitable way.
- Avoid creating disparity amongst ag producers. West Slope and Front Range ag producers rely on Colorado River water and should not be unfairly curtailed in the event of non-compliance.
- Plan for future curtailment – use this time to devise a strategy that will minimize impacts to ag producers if curtailment actions are required.
- Fight for fairness – no one region or type of water use that is junior to the compact should get a pass in the event of noncompliance - ag shouldn't carry the whole burden.
- Don't set new precedent that would negatively impact non-Colorado River basin ag producers.
- Make sure that if consumptive use water is conserved that Colorado gets credit for the savings.
- All consumptive use conserved by ag producers must be adequately compensated.
- Demand management arrangements must be voluntary.



- Any conserved water must be used for compact needs and should not be redirected for other beneficial uses.
- The threat of noncompliance should not be used to move water out of agriculture for non-compact needs.
- Oppose state ownership of water rights for compact compliance purposes.
- Any permanent transfer of water out of agriculture should be approved by the water court.
- Ensure that acquisition of ag water does not cause injury to other ag users.

As the Task Force continues to meet, we encourage some basic considerations be implemented. Public comment should be allowed at all Task Force meetings. It is vitally important that the historical knowledge and experience of water users from across the state have the opportunity to provide comments to help drive the conversation. This includes the opportunity to provide comments on any potential legislative proposals that the Task Force may develop.

The members of our respective agricultural organizations stand ready to be a partner in your discussions. We thank you for your service and dedication to Colorado.

Sincerely,

Colorado Farm Bureau
Colorado Cattlemen's Association
Colorado Livestock Association
Rocky Mountain Farmer's Union

Cc:

Commissioner Becky Mitchell
Lauren Ris
Kevin Rein
Senator Dylan Roberts
Senator Perry Will
Speaker of the House Julie McCluskie
Representative Marc Catlin