

Media Relations Contacts:

American Rivers:
Matt Rice
mrice@americanrivers.org
303.454.3395

Western Resource Advocates:
Bart Miller
Bart.miller@westernresources.org
720.763.3719

Groundbreaking Report Recommends Effective Water Solutions for Agriculture, Business and Residential Use in Colorado River Basin

New analysis identifies water savings that could meet all urban and rural water supply needs through 2060 while protecting agriculture, the economy and the environment, even in drought years

DENVER, July 17, 2014 – [American Rivers](#) and [Western Resource Advocates](#) – two of the foremost authorities on Western water issues – today issued a new report that identifies conservation, reuse and other innovative solutions that could eliminate Western water shortages stemming from the over-taxed and stressed Colorado River. The report defines five cost-effective and clearly defined solutions that – if implemented at a larger scale across the basin – could meet the water needs of the West’s businesses, agriculture, and growing population through 2060.

Communities across the West that rely on the river for drinking water, recreation and agriculture are ready for real-world solutions that they can start today and this solution set provides a game plan.

The Hardest Working River in the West: Common-Sense Solutions for a Reliable Water Future for the Colorado River Basin provides a comprehensive package of proven methods to conserve water. The report then estimates that 4.4 million acre-feet of water* could be saved and made available for other uses if these proven methods are implemented throughout the basin - more than enough water to meet projected growth in water needs in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, for the next half-century.

This report comes at a critical time for these seven Western states. Just last week it was reported that the sustained drought in the southwestern U.S. has depleted Lake Mead to levels not seen since Hoover Dam was completed. Lake Powell, which supplies hydroelectric power to millions of people, is also critically low, jeopardizing its power production. Due to high water demands, the Colorado River no longer regularly reaches the sea and is at even further risk for depletion due to chronic drought and rapid population growth.

“Our report showcases the ‘All-Star’ water solutions – actions that are proven, cost-effective and ready to meet our current and future water needs,” said Bart Miller, Water Program Director at Western Resource Advocates. “The fact is, there is a lot of concern about the Colorado River right now but these solutions will work and help everyone – from agriculture to growing cities – have plenty of water now and in the future. It’s time for our Western leaders to draft these All-Star solutions and put them to work.”

* One acre-foot of water equals the amount of water that covers one acre of land to a depth of one foot, or 326,000 gallons

“There is a widening water gap creating 3.8 million acre-feet of additional water needed to meet the needs of the growing population of the West. This is an enormous amount which, if not carefully managed, could deplete the river and dramatically alter the landscape of the seven basin states,” said Matt Rice, Director of Colorado Basin Programs for American Rivers. “These solutions will ensure the river’s resources meet all future water needs for urban, rural, business and agricultural communities across all seven basin states, while still protecting the natural environment of the West.”

In addition to being cost-effective, these steps are faster and resolve water challenges better and cheaper than dams or diversions. The five solutions in the report protect the West’s recreational economy, are flexible enough to meet demand in high-snowpack, rainy or drought years, and protect the Colorado River for future generations. Each of these solutions has been tested and proven effective in cities or regions across the West.

The five critical steps for solving our current and future water shortages are:

- **Municipal conservation**, saving 1.0 million acre-feet through such efforts as improved landscaping techniques, rebate programs that incentivize water-saving devices and standardized water audits
- **Municipal reuse**, saving 1.2 million acre-feet through gray water treatment and re-use for irrigation, industrial uses and other purposes
- **Agricultural efficiency and water banking**, saving 1.0 million acre-feet via voluntary, compensated improvements in irrigation efficiency and technology, crop shifting and other measures (while avoiding permanently taking agricultural lands out of production)
- **Renewable energy and energy efficiency**, saving 160 thousand acre-feet using wind, solar PV, and geothermal energy solutions, and new water-efficient thermoelectric power plants
- **Innovative water opportunities**, generating up to 1.1 million acre-feet through creative measures such as invasive plant removal, dust-on-snow mitigation and targeted inland desalinization.

According to American Rivers and Western Resource Advocates, the economic and environmental damage of a further-diminished Colorado River are unacceptable. Millions of people rely on the river for drinking water, agriculture and future economic growth. Also, a dry Colorado River would drastically change our quality of life and failing to implement common sense, effective water conservation solutions could result in significant disruptions in Western economies as strident measures such as permanent agricultural fallowing could result.

Some key facts about the river:

- The river irrigates 15 percent of the nation’s crops on 5.7 million acres of farmland.
- The river directly supports \$26 billion in recreational and tourism economies and 234,000 jobs across its seven state basin.
- 36 million people both inside and outside of the Colorado River basin rely on the river for municipal drinking water.

- The river and its tributaries flow through seven national wildlife refuges and 11 national parks.
- More than 30 distinct fish species are found only in the Colorado River. Four of those have gone extinct and 12 are imperiled.

In addition to providing solutions for future water use, this report comes as major municipal water suppliers that rely on the Colorado River are initiating a program to test conservation and efficiency measures to improve water supply reliability as well as bolster the levels of Lakes Mead and Powell.

“Municipal agencies recognizing the challenges facing the River are taking a bold step with their conservation measures, which can prevent permanent fallowing of agricultural land or other drastic measures,” added Miller. “We support their current efforts and recommend they implement the solutions in this report to fully tackle water shortages.”

To learn more about the critical role of the Colorado River to seven Western states, or to read the report in its entirety, please visit www.ColoradoRiverSolutions.org.

About American Rivers

American Rivers protects wild rivers, restores damaged rivers, and conserves clean water for people and nature. Since 1973, American Rivers has protected and restored more than 150,000 miles of rivers through advocacy efforts, on-the-ground projects, and an annual America’s Most Endangered Rivers® campaign. Headquartered in Washington, DC, American Rivers has offices across the country and more than 200,000 members, supporters, and volunteers. Find your connections at AmericanRivers.org, Facebook.com/AmericanRivers, and Twitter.com/AmericanRivers.

About Western Resource Advocates

For the last 25 years Western Resource Advocates has been the West’s premier group of experts protecting the region’s air, land and water. WRA’s pragmatic team of lawyers, scientists and economists craft innovative solutions for the most complex natural resource challenges in the region. WRA shapes a clean energy future that reduces pollution, protects our unique western lands, and addresses climate change. The organization restores degraded rivers and champions solutions to ensure a reliable water future. Go to www.westernresourceadvocates.org and follow us on Twitter @WRADV.