

# Colorado needs this water plan

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*Editorial*

If the value of water to Colorado's future was ever in doubt — and, no, it never was — then the recently released draft of a state water plan should make clear just how important this resource is, from Denver to Durango.

Prepared for Gov. John Hickenlooper by the Colorado Water Conservation Board, the draft report speaks of collaboration and cooperation among interests across the state, but it also makes clear that a looming 163 billion gallon water shortage is not simply a rural versus urban problem.

Water is key to every environmental and economic sector of the state, and Colorado's future is tied to the wise use of this resource.

The draft report points out that the "gap between municipal water supply and demand is growing, and conservation and the completion of proposed water projects are likely insufficient to address projected 2050 shortfalls that could total more than 500,000 acre-feet statewide."

That's enough water to supply a million families of four for one year.

But the shortage will hurt more than just Colorado's urban centers, because as irrigation water is sold for development, valuable crop land — which supports Colorado's multi-billion dollar agriculture industry — is lost.

"At the current rate of transfer, there will be a major reduction in Colorado's agricultural lands in the future," the draft says. "This could impact Colorado's economy and food security. In addition, rural communities could dry-up along with agriculture if enough agricultural business goes away."

Finally, the state faces what the report calls "critical environmental concerns," with an increasing number of fish species "at risk of becoming endangered due to habitat loss."

The state faces all of this at a time of the draft report calls "variable climatic conditions."

Ultimately, water is at the source of Colorado's quality of life; it is an economic and environmental treasure.

This report is a call for action on the part of the state's leaders, not only to complete proposed water projects — such as the Northern Integrated Supply Project, but to consider other, reasonable storage projects that store water while sparing the free-flowing rivers — but to conserve every drop.

This will help Colorado protect the water to which it is entitled under multi-state compacts, one of the goals of a comprehensive water plan.

The conservation board also calls for a plan that "identifies and tests cost-effective alternatives to the permanent 'buy & dry' of irrigated lands," a critical need if Colorado's agricultural economy and rural communities are to be spared.

This will come with a cost, but investment now in the state's future water needs will pay off. For the state's leaders, that means making the decisions now that benefit future generations.

That goes, too, for the state's current residents, who have a responsibility to hand down to their children and grandchildren a state as rich in resources as we currently enjoy. Coloradans must treat water for the asset that it is, and now is the best time to start.