

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting on interim work of the 66th Legislature. On December 5, the Governor's Colorado River Work Group met with the director of the Upper Colorado River Commission to hear a report on the System Conservation Pilot Program.

In July, the commissioner for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation told a U.S. Senate committee that the seven states of the Colorado River Basin must come up with a plan to conserve between 2 and 4 million acre-feet of water in the next year to protect the entire Colorado River system. If the seven states fail to agree on a plan, Commissioner Touton stated that the bureau will step in and impose water cuts on the states. However, the Bureau of Reclamation's authority in Wyoming is limited to the reservoirs it operates.

The Upper Colorado River Basin states responded to Commissioner Touton's call for more water savings by developing a five-part plan that includes reauthorization of the System Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP); drought operation planning for the reservoirs in the Upper Basin, including Flaming Gorge; consideration of a Demand Management program; implementing federal funding for water management infrastructure; and continue strict water management.

The meeting on December 5 was intended to educate the Colorado River Work Group on the System Conservation Pilot Program. The Bureau of Reclamation approved the Upper Colorado River Commission five-part plan and will provide at least \$125 million for projects that mitigate the impacts of long-term drought and depleted storage. The US Congress is in the process of reauthorizing the SCPP, with the expectation that this will occur prior to January 1st. Water right holders on tributaries of the Colorado River, including the Green River, can submit projects that reduce water consumption to the Upper Colorado River Commission after December 14. Projects for 2023 must be submitted by February of 2023, and contracts will be awarded by March of 2023. This program will pay you to reduce water consumption.

I do not like the tight time frames imposed for the System Conservation Pilot Program, and I suspect the only projects that will meet these timelines are the projects that were piloted a few years ago. These projects included payment for shutting water off early, and this included several projects in Sublette County. I have concerns about SCPP, because it is paying water right holders to send water out of Wyoming. Water right holders in the Green River Basin need to follow what is happening as closely as they can. With poor hydrology projected in the Basin and reservoirs rapidly being depleted, we come ever closer to tripping thresholds in the 1922 Colorado River Compact. In past press releases, I have written about the implications of triggering a curtailment under the 1922 Compact. I think all water right holders will need to become more efficient with their water. Please contact me at albert@albertsommers.com with questions or concerns.