

Water Resources Review Committee

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November 2019

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Committee Charge

The Water Resources Review Committee (WRRC) was created to contribute to and monitor the conservation, use, development, and financing of Colorado's water resources for the general welfare of the state (Section 37-98-102, C.R.S.). It is also required to review statewide planning for water resources. The WRRC reviews and proposes legislation to further its purpose. In conducting its review, the WRRC consults with experts in the field of water conservation, quality, use, finance, and development. The WRRC was authorized to meet up to eight times in 2019 and to take two field trips.

Committee Activities

During the 2019 interim, the WRRC held five meetings and took two field trips. The WRRC met with a broad range of water users and government officials, including local water providers, water policy experts, state water planners, and concerned citizens. The committee received briefings on major water issues affecting the state, including demand management and drought contingency plans in the Colorado River basin and emerging technologies for water management. The committee also drafted legislation about two additional topics on which the committee has received briefings in previous years, including water well inspectors and speculation under Colorado water law.

Field trips. In June, the committee made a two-day field trip in the South Platte River Basin, where it visited water diversion and storage facilities, agricultural operations, and restoration projects. This tour was organized by Water Education Colorado. In August, the committee attended the Colorado Water Congress summer conference in Steamboat Springs, where it held a public meeting about the state's instream flow program and attended presentations about water infrastructure, financing, water planning, ongoing water supply studies, and other water management issues.

Colorado River Basin demand management and drought contingency plans. The committee heard presentations from the Colorado Water Conservation Board within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Colorado State University Water Institute, the Nature Conservancy, Hydros Consulting, Denver Water, Northern Water, the Colorado River Water Conservation District, and the Southwestern Water Conservation District regarding on-going discussions about potential demand management programs, drought contingency plans, and other issues in the Colorado River Basin.

Emerging technologies for water management. The committee heard presentations from the University of Colorado Mortenson Center in Global Engineering and the Governor's Office of Information Technology regarding emerging technologies that can be used for water management, including distributed ledger technologies such as blockchain.

Water well inspectors. In 2018, the committee heard a presentation from the Division of Water Resources about the state's Water Well Inspection Program, which was created in 2003. The State Board of Examiners of Water Well Construction and Pump Installation Contractors has authority over the construction of wells, installation of equipment, and licensing of contractors. The program is funded by the Well Inspection Cash Fund through well application fees. A performance audit on the program was completed by the Office of the State Auditor in May 2019.

Speculation under Colorado water law. In 2014, the committee heard a presentation from Colorado Supreme Court Justice Greg Hobbs about why water speculation is prohibited under the Colorado Constitution. In 2018, the committee received a briefing from Chris Treese, Colorado River Water Conservation District, and David Robbins, Hill and Robbins, P.C., about recent land and water transfers in the state and other activity involving investment groups purchasing land and associated water rights in Colorado.

Committee Recommendations

As a result of committee discussion and deliberation, the WRRC recommends the following four bills for consideration in the 2020 legislative session.

Bill A – Require Public Input on Water Demand Management Program. Bill A requires the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Water Resources Review Committee to involve the public and provide opportunities for public comment before adopting a Colorado River demand management program. This process is similar to that used for the Colorado Water Plan under Senate Bill 14-115.

Bill B – Study Emerging Technologies for Water Management. Bill B directs the University of Colorado, in collaboration with the Colorado Water Institute at Colorado State University, to conduct feasibility studies and pilot deployments of new and emerging technologies that have the potential to improve water management.

Bill C – Add Water Well Inspectors Identify High-Risk Wells. Bill C establishes a minimum staffing level for the state's well inspection program and directs the Board of Examiners of Water Well Construction and Pump Installation Contractors to promulgate rules for identifying high-risk wells that should be prioritized for inspection.

Bill D - Study Strengthening Water Anti-Speculation Laws. Bill D requires the Executive Director of the Department of Natural Resources to convene a work group during the 2020 interim to explore ways to strengthen anti-speculation within Colorado water law. The work group is required to provide a written report to the WRRC by August 15, 2021.