

Reclamation awards \$1 million for Colorado River study

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

The Bureau of Reclamation has awarded a \$1 million grant to the seven Colorado River Basin states for a first-ever comprehensive evaluation of water demands on the 1,450 mile river.

The award to The Colorado River Basin Water Supply and demand study was one of three Basin Study Program grants announced by Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Michael L. Connor recently. The program offers support for research that will better define options for future water management of Western river basins where climate change, record drought, surging population and environmental needs have heightened competition for scarce water supplies.

The Basin Study Program grant will enable representatives from Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, California and Arizona to partner with the Bureau of Reclamation to undertake a joint Colorado River Basin water supply and demand study. This will be the first effort to take a comprehensive look at demands on a river that serves as a primary water source for 25 million people from Denver to Los Angeles.

“We are delighted that the Bureau of Reclamation supports this critical, basin-wide study,” said Harris Sherman, executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. “The Colorado River basin states are making great strides in working together to address our common challenges. We need to be pro-active in developing solutions, and this study is an important step in that direction.”

The award requires a 50 percent match, or about \$143,000 in funding and in-kind services, from each of the participating states.

Like the other basin states, Colorado has been independently examining water supplies and demands in a number of ongoing studies, such as the Colorado Water Conservation Board’s Colorado River Water Availability Study.

The grant will allow this and similar studies to be integrated into an evaluation of existing and future demands and available water supply within the entire Colorado River Basin and adjacent service areas. The study will incorporate the latest science, engineering technology and climate

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models and evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches to water management, such as changes to the operation of water supply systems, modifications to existing facilities, development of new facilities and non-structural strategies.

The inaugural Basin Study Program grants support a new initiative by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to focus on addressing the current and future impacts of climate change across the Interior Department's sprawling jurisdiction. Salazar signed a Secretarial Order earlier this week committing Interior and its agencies to coordinate their climate protection strategies.

"Given today's challenges in the area of water resources, it is imperative the federal government be a strong and reliable partner in working with state, tribal and local water managers," Commissioner Connor said recently. "The Bureau of Reclamation is addressing this need by partnering with key stakeholders to conduct comprehensive studies and create basin-specific plans recommending collaborative solutions that will meet water demands and foster sustainable development."

When completed in about two years, the study's findings will be used to help develop options and strategies to meet the existing water uses and the projected increase in water demands given the uncertainties associated with global climate change.

"The state of Colorado is pleased we have been able to secure this federal funding to support this collaborative effort," said CWCB director Jennifer Gimbel, who is also Colorado's Commissioner on the Upper Colorado River Compact Commission. "When this study is

complete, we will be able to integrate the needs of the seven basin states with those in Mexico to help develop collaborative, bi-national solutions."