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From Page:  
3  
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## Study: Oil shale could require lots of water

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**GLENWOOD SPRINGS** — By 2050, full-scale oil shale development in northwest Colorado could require electrical power equivalent to 14 times that being put out by the state's largest power plant, in Craig.

Largely to meet that power demand, it could require more water than the state still is entitled to develop in the Colorado River watershed under an interstate compact.

Those are some of the conclusions of a new study on energy-related water needs. It came out of 2005 legislation aimed at assessing water needs and the ability to meet them in each of the state's river basins. It was supported by a grant obtained by the state's Colorado and Yampa/White River basin roundtables.

On Monday, Colorado Basin Roundtable members discussed the study's findings, and voiced skepticism about whether it would make sense for such oil

shale development to occur.

Greg Trainor, also Grand Junction's utilities manager, co-chairs the roundtable subcommittee that oversaw the report's development, and he presented its highlights to other roundtable members. He told them he questions the wisdom of committing such resources to oil shale.

"Would our investment be better placed somewhere else?" he asked.

The study estimates that developing oil shale in place, or in situ, underground could require 1.5 barrels of water per barrel of oil produced. Mining it and heating it above ground in a retort could almost double that consumption, the study found.

An assumed maximum level of development in 2050, involving 1.5 million barrels a day of in situ production and 50,000 barrels a day of retort production, could require nearly 400,000 acre feet of water, the study projects. Adding in natural gas and other forms of energy development in

the region could push total energy-related water demands to more than 400,000 acre feet.

By comparison, the Colorado River's annual average streamflow at the Colorado-Utah state line is about 3.5 million acre feet.

Basin roundtable member Mark Fuller said the expected resource requirements are so overwhelming that prospective oil shale development shouldn't drive analysis of future water demand. The demands of natural gas development warrant greater attention, he said.

"The fact is that natural gas (development) in particular is here now and is impacting people and is going to be here for a while," he said.

But roundtable chair Jim Pokrandt said oil shale development can't be ignored altogether.

"As ludicrous as oil shale seems to be, it would be ludicrous not to consider it in the big picture," he said.

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