

West Slope water interests

By **MARIJA B. VADER**
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GLENWOOD SPRINGS — Citing a need for water to fuel booming growth on the Front Range, local governments there have formed a coalition that western Colorado water officials said they see as another effort to grab Western Slope water.

Led by Arapahoe County Commissioner Marie Mackenzie, the Colorado Water Partnership launched its campaign Thursday at the state capitol.

"For the last several years, Colorado lawmakers have addressed growth with respect to transportation, education and community planning," Mackenzie said. "But we have

yet to see a vision for solving the problem of a reliable water supply for our exploding population, and that is the mission of the Colorado Water Partnership."

The partnership supports legislation that would direct a state-funded study of projects to provide at least 120,000 acre-feet of water for new growth.

wary of new coalition

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So far, the legislation has no sponsor, said Chips Barry, manager of the Denver Water Department.

The draft legislation pointed to the Upper Colorado and Upper Gunnison basins as the source for the water, said Colorado River Water Conservation District Manager Eric Kuhn.

"The 120,000 acre-foot project looked exactly like Union Park," said Kuhn, referring to Arapahoe County's and Parker's proposal to ship that amount of water annually from the Upper Gunnison basin.

As a response to the partnership, river

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district directors reiterated their opposition Thursday to any further transmountain diversions of water from the Western Slope.

"We want to make a clear statement to the Front Range — we don't see any need for additional diversions," Kuhn said.

Instead, the Front Range should better manage its current water supplies, district directors said Thursday in a statement released after an executive session that stretched over two days in Glenwood Springs.

Nearly 400,000 acre-feet of water is available annually in the Denver metro area without building new dams, directors contended.

Also, Front Range water users can reuse, conserve and share their water, as well as better manage groundwater and transfer water within basins, stretching the Front Range's need for additional water even further, they said.

Current and future water uses, including water for endangered fish and recreation, must be recognized and protected before more water is sent to the Front Range,

directors said.

The Colorado River Basin has up to 450,000 acre-feet of surplus water not being used within the state or obligated to downstream states, the partnership contended.

Also, the state needs an additional 300,000 acre-feet of water for the estimated 1 million new state residents by 2020, Mackenzie said.

Transmountain diversions currently ship 500,000 acre-feet of Western Slope water over the Continental Divide annually.

One acre-foot of water contains about 325,000 gallons. Six-tenths of one acre-foot serves an average suburban family of four for one year.

Partnership supporters include officials from El Paso County, Arapahoe County, Colorado Springs, Aurora, Adams County, Northglenn, Elbert County and Lafayette, Mackenzie said.

Though invited, Douglas County declined membership, said Commissioner Jim Sullivan.

Douglas County has struck a partnership with the river district as well as the Denver Water Department to study water needs for the south metro area.

The Denver Water Department was not

invited to join, nor would it join if an invitation were to be extended, said Barry.

"It seems to be the wrong way to go about true cooperation with all the respective players," Barry said. "Cooperative work with the Western Slope requires years of foundation-building and then a gentle touch." Barry said he found it "interesting" that 120,000 acre-feet is the amount of water available within the Colorado River Basin and its tributaries for development under the endangered fish recovery program.

Barry also questioned the viability of the partnership.

"My sense is: How can they have a partnership without the river district, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District or Denver?" Barry said. "What kind of a partnership is that when the three biggest players aren't even invited?"

Northern Associate General Manager Darel Zimbelman said that while his district was invited to join the partnership, it will not be part of the group.

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