

Report: Tapping Gunnison ill-advised

Diverting water will sully area, activists say

by **Joey Bunch**
Denver Post Environment Writer

Legislators and Front Range urban planners looking for water should look elsewhere when it comes to the Gunnison River Basin, according to a two-year study released Tuesday by the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies.

The environmental law and policy group said that tapping the Gunnison would slowly drain the region of its resplendent beauty, its environmental balance and its economic lifeblood.

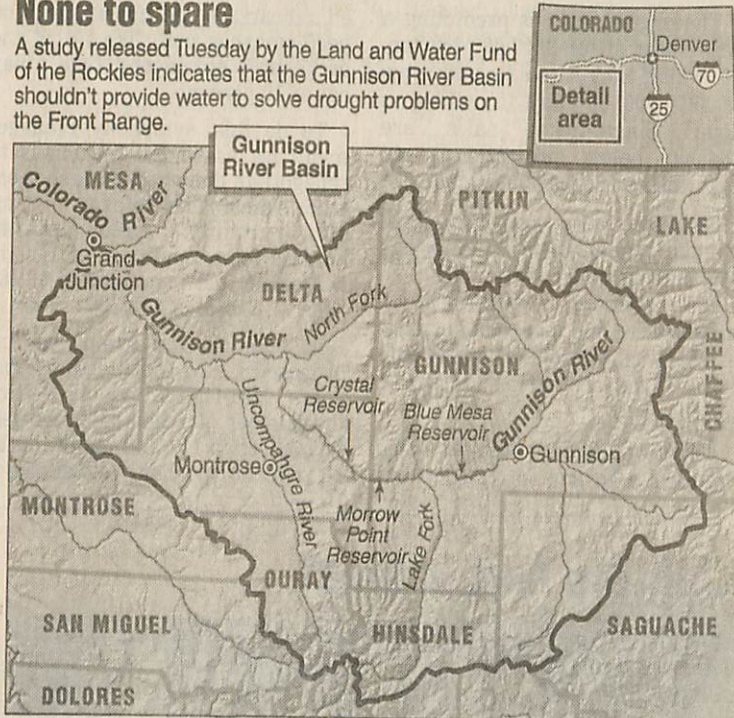
Instead, the Front Range can find more than enough water to meet its needs now and in the future by cutting its wasteful ways, according to the group.

"It would be unconscionable to take water from the Gunnison to meet our out-of-control growth and sprawl here, especially when we waste so . . . much water," said Bruce Driver, the LAW Fund's executive director.

In a 1998 ruling, the state Supreme Court said that the Blue Mesa Reservoir near Gunnison

None to spare

A study released Tuesday by the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies indicates that the Gunnison River Basin shouldn't provide water to solve drought problems on the Front Range.



The Denver Post / Thomas McKay

may hold almost 240,000 acre-feet of water — or 78.2 trillion gallons — that could be sold to utilities and other water users across the state.

Numerous failed proposals since World War II have targeted

the region as the future watering hole for the burgeoning population growth and urban development on the southern Front Range.

The measures failed because of the cost and headaches of pumping water from the Western Slope

over the Continental Divide, when water from other sources was cheaper and easier to come by.

The drought has intensified the search for water across the state, and that has the LAW Fund and basin residents concerned that the Gunnison will be a prime target.

"The (LAW Fund) report shows why the Front Range would be well-advised to find solutions to its water problems in its own backyard," said Ken Spann, an Almont rancher.

New demands for the water could unleash a flood of opposition from federal agencies, basin residents and businesses and other states that have a legal right to Gunnison's water, said Bart Miller, a former Department of the Interior lawyer who heads up the LAW Fund's water program.

The cost also should be a deal-breaker, he said. Estimates have put the price for a pipeline from the Blue Mesa Reservoir over the Continental Divide at \$1.2 billion.

But that price tag makes the deal more appealing to Chris Paulson, an attorney for the Colorado Water Partnership, a coalition of business and government interests.

That would work out to a cost of less than \$3 per 1,000 gallons. Local water boards have paid up

to \$5 during the drought, he said.

"That's very affordable," Paulson said of the Gunnison's water.

Frank Jaeger, manager of the Parker Water and Sanitation District for 22 years and a member of the state Ground Water Commission, said there's nothing new in the LAW Fund's conclusions.

"It's the same rhetoric I've been hearing for more than 20 years," he said.

Jaeger said he isn't sure whether the Gunnison River Basin can meet the Front Range's needs, but it shouldn't be taboo to consider it.

"I think we've got to get past these 'not one more drop' and 'not from my backyard' attitudes and find a solution that works for both sides of the divide," he said. "This is not a Front Range problem but a state problem."

"The Front Range is the economic engine of the state, and we've got to find a way to get water from where it is to where it's needed, and that's just a fact."

He agreed with the LAW Fund that cutting waste is important but disagreed that it's a sole solution.

"It's an important piece of the puzzle, but it's not the only answer," he said. "We have to have new sources of water, and we have to have more storage" in existing reservoirs.

Debt may close curtain on Springs or

By Kyle MacMillan
Denver Post Critic-at-Large

With \$950,000 in cumulative debt and an immediate cash shortfall that might not allow it to meet its Jan. 15 payroll, the Colorado Springs Symphony could be facing the end of its existence.

"That is a possibility. It's one we don't like, and we are very uncomfortable in this situation, but that is a possibility," said Larry Barrett, who took over as the orchestra's executive director in November.

Alan Isaacson, a spokesman for the musicians and their union lo-

cal, acknowledged the situation is serious, but he believes the orchestra is dramatizing the facts to secure long-term concessions from the musicians and to significantly scale back the orchestra's scope.

"I frankly think it all boils down to: They want to break the contract," he said. "It's not about the short-term problem. It's about a desire to make the orchestra go back to a time that mirrors the 1970s from a budget-size perspective."

Even after emergency fundraising, the orchestra ended its 2002 fiscal year in July with a deficit of \$92,000.

The organization is predicting a cash shortfall of \$217,000 by Jan. 15, which Barrett said could grow to \$900,000 by May if nothing is done. Single-ticket sales are \$64,000 below projections, and fundraising is \$280,000 behind.

To offset these budget gaps, orchestra management is proposing \$600,000 in cuts, which would include reductions of \$108,000 in administrative and marketing expenses. But the bulk of the cuts would fall on the orchestra's part-time musicians.

They would be asked to forgo paid leave, to give up 12 contract-

ed rehearsals and nonsubscription performances and, like all of the orchestra's employees, take a pay cut of 10 percent.

To do this, symphony management has asked the musicians to renegotiate their current labor contract, which is set to expire in August. It requires a section player to be paid for a minimum of 144 rehearsals or performances at \$88.88 each — a total of \$12,800 a year.

In addition, the symphony has proposed a new contract for fiscal years 2004-06 that would reduce the number of rehearsals and performances to 101 and maintain the 10 percent pay cut — reducing a

section player's annual salary to \$8,000.

"It turns out that the cost structure we have right now, given the economy that we're in, is not sustainable in its present form, and we're really seeking the musicians cooperation in coming up with creative solutions," said Shawn Rain tree, the symphony's board president.

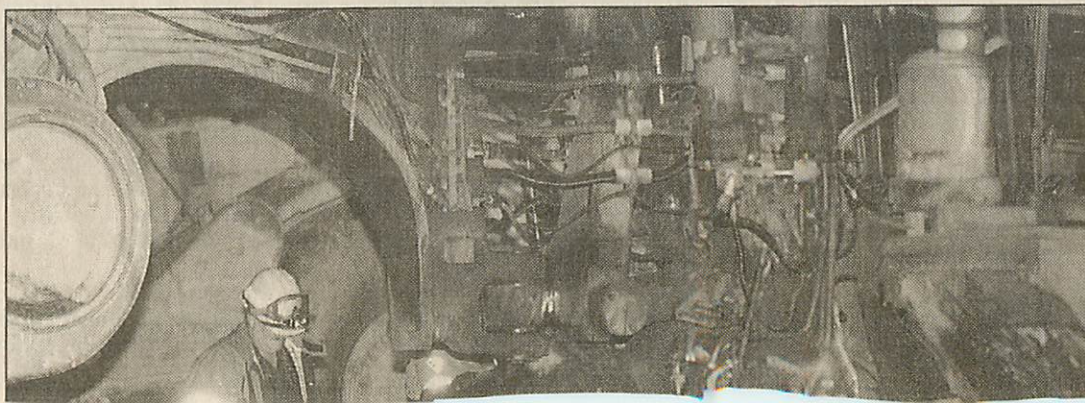
The orchestra committee and union representatives are willing to meet with the orchestra management, Isaacson said, but a constructive discussion of the issues must take place before any contract renegotiations could be considered.

Ex-Ouray assessor charged

DA alleges official altered property values

By Nancy Lofholm
Denver Post Western Slope Bureau

Firefighters hurt in blast



Garfield charged

Funds allegedly u

By Nancy Lofholm
Denver Post Western Slope News Bureau

In early 2000, a Garfield County social-services worker told co-workers she needed surgery for cervical cancer. Weeks later she