

Colorado River Basin Water Supply-Demand Study: Environmental & Recreational Flows Workgroup

Notes from a Presentation to Legislative Drought Subcommittee
August 28, 2013 by Steve Harris

- Thanks to Jon Boller, Chairman Cervantes.
- Standing in for Melinda Kassen, serving on Basin Study Flows Group.
- Supply-Demand curve has converged and shortages are anticipated.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

- Study does not anticipate climate change scenarios.
- Study relies on demand projections from the states: creating incentives to exaggerate demand scenarios.

Healthy Flows Group Work Plan:

- Healthy rivers are tied to economic vitality.
- Unless water managers act deliberately to protect flows, the trend to degradation will continue.
- Basin states, Reclamation, NGOs represented on workgroup.
- Flows Workgroup will select up to six river reaches for opportunities to protect environmental and recreational attributes.
- Report on Policies and Financing Mechanisms to employ in protecting Environmental Flows (end of 2014).

Three Positive Signals from Basin Study:

- Supplying Environmental/Recreational uses is **co-equal** with Agricultural and Municipal demands. Two of six resource categories analyzed are instream values (Ecological and Recreational Resources)
- Study suggests “Soft Path” **conservation and efficiency** strategies can make up a majority of future supply-demand disparity.
- Competing users can **cooperate** to resolve imbalances.

River-oriented Recreation is Economically Important:

- If Colorado River were a company, it would rank #155 on Fortune 500 and be the # 19 employer.
- In NM, Economic Benefit is \$1.7 billion. Provides 47,000 Jobs.
- Fishing, whitewater have large unfulfilled potential.
- Relies on adequate flows.

Recommend “Soft Path” Solutions to Supply Demand Disparity

- New Supply alternatives are extremely costly.
- No region has surplus to export.
- Demand reduction has proven effective in a number of localities.
- **“Low-Hanging Fruit” in New Mexico:**
 1. Understanding flows within the system informs choices among trade-offs. Fund Science.
 2. Reduce municipal system losses (comprised 13% of withdrawals).
 3. Meter Ag Headgates (saves 10% of diversions)