ELBERT CREEK
WATER COMPANY

WATER IN THE WORKS

AN ELBERT CREEK WATER COMPANY QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
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A Message from ECWC

Hello, and welcome to the Summer 2023 edition of *Water in the Works*, a quarterly newsletter published by Elbert Creek Water Company (ECWC). The purpose of this newsletter is to improve communication between ECWC customers and staff while providing customers with useful and informative articles, ideas, and updates about our distribution area.

Elbert Creek Water Company New Water Rates for 2024

In keeping with the past several years, ECWC has hired BBC Research and Consulting to perform another rate study to ensure our water/wastewater rates remain competitive for our distribution area. To that end, ECWC's rates have been updated for the 2024 calendar year. A specific announcement containing the new base fees, consumption tiers, and updated rules and regulations will be sent to all ECWC customers on December 1st. In the meantime, to get familiar with the new rates, rules, and regulations, please click the following links:

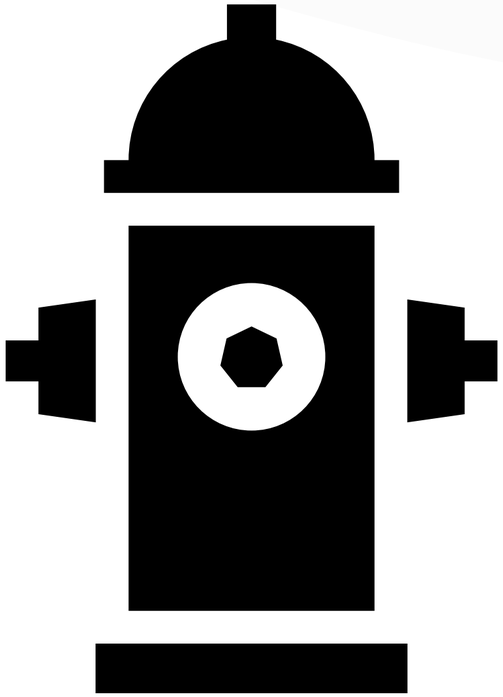
2024 Rate Study Summary Letter:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600862ade344bd2f8788cee0/t/6557a9dc5ace072049e678bb/1700243932814/2024+Rate+Study+Summary+Letter.pdf

2024 Rate Study Presentation:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600862ade344bd2f8788cee0/t/6557a99a431d05115503581c/1700243866994/ECWC+2024+Rates+Study+Customer+Presentation.pdf

Updated Rules & Regulations:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600862ade344bd2f8788cee0/t/6557a89173a597479c28a5c4/1700243601811/ECWC+Water+and+Wastewater+Rules+and+Regulations+-+Final+Effective+01+01+24.pdf

More Flushing?

You likely have received a notice over the past few weeks about Elbert Creek Water Company (ECWC) staff performing fire hydrant flushing and flow test in your neighborhood. This is because ECWC is continuing to perform inspections, flow tests, and necessary flushing to ensure that hydrants are in working condition, have sufficient fire flow rates, and are clear of any debris. ECWC provides inspection and flow test reports to the Durango Fire Protection District, so firefighters have accurate knowledge of where hydrants are located and the fire flow that is available. ECWC will be actively inspecting and testing hydrants over the next few weeks throughout the distribution system. Flow tests can sometimes cause discolored water due to high velocity flows picking up debris in the pipelines: if you experience discolored water in your tap, please run the cold water until the water becomes clear again. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact ECWC.



West Slope Water Interests Make a $98.5M Play for Major Colorado River Water Right

By Jerd Smith for Water Education Colorado

Negotiations are underway in Colorado to purchase one of the oldest, largest water rights on the Colorado River within state lines, expanding that water's legal use to include environmental benefits, and creating one of the most significant opportunities in the state to protect streamflows for fish, habitat and wildlife.

Led by the Glenwood Springs-based Colorado River District, the proposed $98.5 million deal would allow a coalition of West Slope entities to purchase from Xcel Energy the most senior water right on that segment of the river and lease it back to Xcel's Shoshone Hydropower Plant eight miles east of Glenwood Springs.

"It feels like the biggest investment we could make for water security for this side of the mountain," said Kathy Chandler-Henry, chair of the river district board and an Eagle County Commissioner. She was referring to the Western Slope of the Continental Divide.

"I know it's a big price tag, but in the future it will feel like a bargain," she said.

That's true in part because the volume of water is so large. According to Colorado River District documents, the water right generates anywhere from 41,000 to 86,000 acre-feet of water in a dry year. An acre-foot equals nearly 326,000 gallons. For comparison, Cheesman Reservoir, a Denver Water reservoir 50 miles southwest of the metro area, holds 79,000 acre-feet.

West Slope water interests have been trying for decades to find a way to purchase or at least control the Shoshone plant water right because it provides an important buffer for the river itself and for West Slope water users, Chandler-Henry said. If another electric company or water utility won control of the water right, West Slope interests worried that the water would not be managed in their interests.

But Xcel has never agreed to a sale of the water right and as recently as 2018 has said it wasn't interested in changing the status quo. Xcel declined to comment on this proposed purchase, but Andy Mueller, general manager of the Colorado River District, said a draft agreement with the utility is in place and that Xcel is ready to support the change, in part to help protect the crisis-ridden Colorado River system. "Xcel has shown a renewed interest in the health and viability of the Colorado River," Mueller said via email.

In Colorado, water rights are tied to a particular stream segment and are regulated, or administered, based on the date they were first legally established. The Shoshone water right has a 1902 date.

Under the terms of the current proposal from the River District and its West Slope partners, which include 17 local governments and water entities, Xcel would continue to use the water to drive the turbines in the hydropower plant. When the plant isn't operating, if it's temporarily shut down for repairs for instance, the water would remain in the river, protected from upstream diverters by its 1902 water right.

Denver Water is one of those upstream diverters and, in years past, when the power plant wasn't operating, has been able to use water it would otherwise need to leave in the river to flow downstream to fulfill the plant's more senior water right. Whether the utility will back the purchase isn't clear. Denver Water declined to comment, saying it was waiting to learn more about the proposal.

In the water arena, a water right can have one of several designated rights to use, including agricultural, industrial, municipal and, just since the 1970s, instream or environmental.

Water rights are also classified based on whether they take water out of the stream for the intended use, termed a consumptive use, or whether they protect water from diversion so it can continue flowing in the stream for a prescribed benefit, which is referred to as a nonconsumptive use. Most uses fall in the consumptive use category. But the Shoshone water right, because the water returns to the stream once it passes through the hydropower plant, is nonconsumptive, as are environmental and recreational flow water rights, which keep water in the stream for the benefit of fish, wildlife, habitat and recreation."The whole state benefits from having a good, strong environment. And because this is the most senior nonconsumptive water right on the Colorado River, its ecological and environmental benefits are huge, especially with drought and climate change," Chandler-Henry said.

The river district has agreed to contribute $20 million to the $98.5 million purchase, and is asking the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) for an additional $20 million grant. Another $10 million would be contributed by 17 governments and water agencies. The river district is seeking another $48 million from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which has $4 billion set aside for drought resiliency in the Colorado River Basin, according to the grant proposal submitted to the CWCB.The negotiations are likely to take months, Mueller said, and will require approvals from the CWCB and potentially state legislators, as well as the Bureau of Reclamation and eventually a state water court, which will have to approve the expansion of legal uses from industrial to both industrial and environmental.

Another benefit of the Shoshone Water right is that its bountiful flows help support the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program, a federal initiative that works to protect four endangered fish species on the river. Water utilities are obligated to help support the program as well and can face harsh penalties if there isn't enough water in the stream to support the fish. "Importantly, upstream and downstream water users all benefit from Shoshone's contributions to the Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery Program," Mueller said.

Environmental groups such as American Rivers see the proposed purchase as a major opportunity to help stabilize the Colorado River within state lines and across its seven-state basin.

Matt Rice is southwest regional director for American Rivers. "I see this as a real opportunity to do a really big transformative thing for the river and the state, and an opportunity to unify the state around the river. A big thing like this has a way of bringing people together," he said. Chuck Ogilby is a long-time river advocate and former member of the Colorado (River) Basin Roundtable, a public group that represents local water users reliant on the Colorado River mainstem within Colorado and that helps decide how state funding is spent within the basin. "It's the best news the Western Slope could ever have," Ogilby said. "All we can do now is cross our fingers and hope the West Slope gets those water rights."

Link to article: https://www.watereducationcolorado.org/fresh-water-news/west-slope-water-interests-make-a-98-5m-play-for-a-major-colorado-river-water-right/

Looking Good: Colorado Reservoirs Reach Highest Levels in Three Years

By Jerd Smith for Water Education Colorado

Thanks to an exceptional year of deep winter snows and frequent summer rains, Colorado's drought-stricken reservoirs have reached a three-year high, with the statewide average standing at 102% of normal, up from 78% at this time last year.

"Statewide [reservoir levels] increased to above normal for the first time in three years," said Karl Wetlaufer, a hydrologist and assistant snow survey supervisor for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Lakewood. "We've seen really significant increases in every individual river basin as well as statewide."
Wetlaufer's comments came last week at a meeting of the state's Water Availability Task Force, which monitors rain and snow, weather forecasts, and stream and soil conditions statewide. Wetlaufer is a member of the task force.

The numbers don't mean all the state's reservoirs are full, but that their "fullness" at this time is above average for this time of year. Reservoirs are tracked in each of Colorado's eight major river basins, with the South Platte and Arkansas basins seeing the biggest gains, Wetlaufer said.

Colorado derives the majority of its drinking and farm water supplies from mountain snows that are collected in reservoirs, and as a result, reservoir levels are closely watched. Hydrologists track water throughout a period of time known as the water year, which begins Oct. 1 and ends Sept. 30.

Water year 2023 has given Colorado and other Western states a major reprieve from a 22-plus-year drought cycle that is considered the worst in more than 1,200 years. Precipitation registered at 108% of normal.
The year "has been wetter than average for a lot of areas around the state," said Becky Bolinger, assistant state climatologist at Colorado State University's Climate Center who is also a member of the task force.

This year is giving the whole state a much-needed leg up on moisture going into the winter. This doesn't mean that the megadrought is over, though for a two-week period in July, the state was actually drought free, Bolinger said. But since then low levels of drought have returned to the southwest and south-central part of the state, including the San Luis Valley, where Alamosa had its driest summer on record, receiving just 4.32 inches of rain, down from a norm of 7.5 to 8 inches.

Looking ahead, the water picture remains healthy. An El Niño weather pattern that is expected to arrive shortly and continue into the winter and next spring will bring with it wet snows for much of Colorado, with the exception of the northwest mountains.

That same weather pattern means the danger of ultra-dry conditions returning in the next six months is slim, Bolinger said.

"Overall I am not seeing any indicators over the next six months that things are going to turn bad, but in the next year a lot will change. The area I will probably watch is the northern mountains. That is an area that could be at risk for developing drought," she said.

Still water utilities, coming off a summer when rains kept lawn sprinklers turned down and helped bolster those reservoir levels, are pleased with the situation.

"The South Platte Basin has had a really good summer which translates into lower demand on our system," said Swithin Dick, water resources administrator for the Centennial Water and Sanitation District in Highlands Ranch. "It's looking good going into the winter."

https://www.watereducationcolorado.org/fresh-water-news/looking-good-colorado-reservoirs-reach-highest-levels-in-three-years/