

Jefferson County Association of REALTORS Water Policy

The Problem

Colorado is the third fastest growing state by percent. Eight of the nation's eighteen fastest growing counties are in Colorado. State population projections suggest an additional 1.7 million residents (approximately a 41 percent increase) can be expected in the next 20 years. This has caused increased competition for limited water supplies between the municipal, agricultural and environmental sectors. As this past summer has demonstrated, there is significant stress on the state's physical infrastructure. This stress has serious implications for the real estate industry in Colorado. A stable long-term supply of water is necessary for residents. Homeowners must have confidence that they have a stable water supply before making the largest single investment of their lives. Business must have a stable supply of water for our economy to thrive.

As with other challenges facing our state, there are no simple solutions. While the drought-induced restrictions on water consumption have focused attention on this issue and created a demand for action; we must not lose sight of the fact that our decisions have future consequences. At times like this there is a tendency toward quick fixes. Public officials and others should resist this temptation. The solutions must be as integrated as the problem. One result of the water restrictions of the Summer of 2002 has been calls for growth control and a halt to building new homes. The impact of that type of decision on the problem of housing availability and affordability for future generations must not be lost. We must make sure that as we address water issues we do not exacerbate interrelated problems nor negatively impact our quality of life or the environment.

Policy

The Jefferson County Association of REALTORS believes it is time to create a new paradigm for Colorado water policy. We must move from competition for a scarce resource to cooperation. State and municipal government, as well as special districts, must act in coordination to assure long-term water needs are met.

1. JCAR supports the recent initiative undertaken to forge guidelines for sharing water. We urge the various government entities and boards to adopt the principles for sharing Colorado water that has been developed for Colorado's 58 rural and six urban counties. The principles are:
 - a) All users must share in solving resource problems.
 - b) The state, when requested, should help communities plan water use.
 - c) Full development of existing water supplies should be considered before water transfers are undertaken.
 - d) Existing water storage structures should be improved before building new ones.
 - e) The right of owners to market their water rights, including leases to businesses and cities, should be protected.
 - f) A balance should be sought between consumption and preserving flows for recreational, hydroelectric and environmental needs.

- g) Adverse impacts of future water projects must be minimized.
- h) Water supply solutions must benefit the area of origin and the area of use.
- i) Water conservation measures that do not injure other water rights should be pursued.
- j) Ongoing water education should be provided.

While JCAR endorses the principles, we believe development of new storage facilities should proceed at the same time as improvements to existing facilities.

- 2) JCAR supports a comprehensive state water plan. Good information is the foundation of good policies and decisions. We support a comprehensive study by basin of the need, available resources, and opportunities to increase water availability.
- 3) JCAR supports development of additional storage capacity. Storage projects, including underground storage, off-stream storage, increasing capacity of existing facilities and new reservoirs must be subject to cost benefit analysis that includes societal and environmental impacts and costs and the cost of inaction.
- 4) JCAR supports communication and joint action by water providers. The market-based model employed by the Parker Water District exemplifies the new paradigm in water development and incorporates many strategies we believe are essential to future water development. These strategies include development of storage capacity (Reuter-Hess Reservoir), development of groundwater, and transfer of agricultural water gained through efficiency to suburban use, and maintaining the agricultural land in production thus protecting the community from which the water is transferred. We believe this is a model that demonstrates the success of cooperation that should be shared with other providers.
- 5) Transfers of water from farm to city will continue. Protection of private property rights whether in real property or water is a fundamental value of the Jefferson County Association of REALTORS. Holders of agricultural water rights should be able to transfer their rights to others – municipalities or industry, without undue interference. JCAR supports appropriate safeguards for the areas from which the water is being transferred that do not interfere with the rights of the holder of the water right. JCAR supports legislation to enhance the ability of the holder of a water right to lease their water right, particularly in dry years.
- 6) Conservation and efficiency are critical. JCAR supports
 - a) Conservation pricing. Significant reductions in water usage can be achieved through the pricing structure. The amount charged to meet basic needs should be reasonable with steep increases in cost for usage over a base amount.
 - b) A review and revision of local development codes revised to eliminate any requirement that increases water usage including but not limited to requirements for water-intensive landscaping.
 - c) Withholding approval of developments approved with covenants requiring water-intensive landscaping.
 - d) Metering of all housing units.
 - e) Education cities about the impacts of their development on water usage. Sharing of information, successes and challenges among municipalities should be encouraged.

- 7) JCAR supports development of a conservation ethic and awareness by the public through education. Conservation education is the job of everyone – schools, water departments and REALTORS. JCAR will develop and distribute water conservation information for use in new home packets.