

At the existing rate of use, Clark County can support a population of slightly more than 1 million until the turn of the century.

With a rate of 20 percent conservation, 1.2 million people can be supported through the year 2006 with existing water sources.

City and county officials have stepped up conservation campaigns and growth controls in an effort to stretch the Colorado River lifeline. They're also hunting for new water sources - on and off the river.

Such measures are being pursued with a growing sense of urgency in light of the Las Vegas Valley Water District's promise to deliver 80,000 acre-feet more water to developers. That's 80,000 more acre-feet than the Water District has available from its annual 15,407 acre-foot cut of the mighty Colorado.

Local governments, through the new Southern Nevada Water Authority, have asked for an additional 32,000 acre-feet, the rest of the river not under contract.

It is hoped that the formation of the metropolitan water district will strengthen the state's hand in dealing with the myriad governmental agencies that determine water policy.

The state Colorado River Commission, which handles water contracts through the Southern Nevada Water System and was instrumental in helping to establish the riverside town of Laughlin, has passed on the request.

The fate of Clark County's bid now rests in the hands of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. But the venerable agency that built Hoover Dam in 1935 has required an environmental assessment and could delay a decision for more than a year.

County Commission Chairman Jay Bingham said he hopes to look beyond the Colorado River for water

to grow on.

The Las Vegas Valley Water District last year applied for 250,000 acre-feet of ground water from three rural Nevada counties, with 100,000 of that coming from the Virgin River in Clark County.

State Engineer Michael Turnipseed has delayed hearings on the request until next year at the earliest, so federal agencies can measure those environmental