

Date Submitted

Jan 20, 2012

Option Name

Water Efficiency Action Network of the Colorado River Basin (WEAN-CRB)

Description of Option

WEAN-CRB is an existing organization that may prove crucial in implementing some efficiency options proposed by the Colorado River Basin Study. The mission of WEAN-CRB is: to collaboratively advance the understanding, application, and effectiveness of water use efficiency in the states of the Colorado River Basin.

WEAN-CRB is currently in a pilot program phase that will operate during its first 2 years as an unincorporated ad-hoc organization with the Alliance for Water Efficiency as its fiscal agent. The Network encompasses government, non-governmental, public-private partnerships, and private interest entities from the municipal and industrial, energy, research, environmental, agricultural, and tribal government sectors. The bulk of the work of the Network is conducted by work groups organized around a specific task or work product related to advancing water use efficiency in the basin states. WEAN-CRB is managed by a 7-9 member Steering Committee with a balanced representation of basin states and types of organizations.

A White Paper that describes the feasibility/scoping assessment conducted for CRB-WEAN can be found at http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org/water/Misc/11-01-2011-Re_Revise%20DRAFT%20WHITE%20PAPER.pdf

Location

WEAN-CRB will work at the local, state, and basin-wide levels.

Quantity and Timing

WEAN-CRB officially begins its pilot phase on February 1, 2012. WEAN-CRB represents an ideal entity to both calculate the water supply potential of basin-wide water efficiency; *and* realize such potential by coordinating and facilitating basin-wide water efficiency practices.

Technical Feasibility

A feasibility/scoping analysis of WEAN-CRB was conducted in 2011 that consisted of: (i) 2 rounds of interviews with key water conservation experts from the 7 basin states; (ii) 3 regional workshops; and (iii) a mini-workshop with US/Mexico border tribes. The scoping identified and prioritized basin-wide water efficiency needs; identified and prioritized potential work products to satisfy the prioritized water efficiency needs; and concluded there is enough value and a sufficient critical mass of interested stakeholders in the basin to move forward with the concept of regional water efficiency collaboration.

Costs

During the pilot phase, work products of WEAN-CRB will be produced at no charge by its members. Most costs will be related to a WEAN-CRB annual meeting. The following annual membership dues sliding

scale has been adopted to cover expenses: (1) \$50/year for entities with an operating budget of \$50k or less; (2) \$100/year for local or state entities; (3) \$100/year for organizations with an operating budget of \$100k or less; (4) \$200/year for organizations with an operating budget of more than \$100k. During or after the pilot phase, WEAN-CRB might also apply and receive grants to contract some of its work and facilitate expert/technical workshops to accelerate the production of some of the work products of the working groups. Reasonable costs for such contract work and technical workshops would be \$175,000 - which could be funded by both public and private sources.

Permitting

None.

Legal/Public Policy Considerations

Regional collaboration to advance the understanding, application, and effectiveness of water use efficiency in the states of the Colorado River Basin would not require any formal agreement among members of WEAN-CRB, nor any Memorandum of Understanding among basin states, nor any changes in water rights or the Law of the River.

Reliability

Basin-wide water efficiency is a no-regrets option for addressing the CO River supply imbalance problem. Over the last decades, efficiency has been found to have stretched supply in the Basin by 1.4 million AF. This “additional” supply has had an enormous positive impact in ensuring an uninterrupted distribution of Colorado River water to water users. Operationally, water efficiency can reduce peak demands and provide a cheap “additional” water supply to support drought management. At a planning level, efficiency can allow water providers to delay, downsize, or even avoid large infrastructure projects - potentially saving millions dollars, a portion of which can be invested in repairing, servicing, and replacing old infrastructure. Thus, to the extent WEAN-CRB effectively advances water efficiency in the basin, it would increase the reliability of the water supply.

Water Quality

A strong relationship has been found to exist between agricultural water efficiency, water quality, and agricultural production. For example, excess irrigation and canal seepage in the basin dissolves native salts and selenium in the soils and transports these to the Colorado River. In just 1 year, the Colorado River transported about 1.1 million tons of salt to Central Arizona through CAP (U.S. Geological Survey Water-Data Report AZ-97-1). WEAN-CRB may support the basin-wide work of the Colorado River Salinity Control Forum, Reclamation, the NRCS, and the basin states related to the implementation of water efficiency practices to control salt loading reductions in the Colorado River.

Energy Needs

Water efficiency can play an important role in reducing the energy use or greenhouse gas emissions of states and cities located in the basin. Water efficiency programs may save energy at utilities’ treatment plants, pumping stations, and wastewater treatment plants. Indoor conservation measures that save hot water also save the energy used by the consumer to heat water. This energy demand can be substantial: according to the U.S. Department of Energy, water heating accounts for 14 to 25% of a home’s energy use. A water-energy nexus work group of WEAN-CRB may advance the implementation of water

efficiency measures that save hot water, such as promoting efficient showerheads, clothes washers, and faucets; and may also be an ideal work group to analyze the potential basin-wide energy use and greenhouse gas reduction potential of M&I water efficiency practices.

Hydroelectric Energy Generation

N/A.

Recreation

Efficiency practices can directly improve flow and will increase fishing & rafting days.

Environment:

Efficiency practices can directly improve flow which can enhance many river ecosystems.

Socioeconomics

Basin-wide water efficiency should have a net positive socio-economic impact. Compared to other new water supply options, efficiency is clearly the most cost-effective investment. A more cost-effective investment means that municipalities and families can invest the money saved in education, health care, environmental conservation, and recreation.

Cities and utilities can quickly adapt a diversified portfolio of conservation programs in response to short-term and medium-term changes in population, development, and precipitation patterns. Thus, in a future in which climate change may create vast uncertainties, conservation represents for cities a low risk investment and a surety for population and economic growth. In addition, efficiency can preserve the agricultural cultural heritage by reducing the need to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of irrigated acreage in the basin to meet urban demand - while enhancing Colorado River water quality, increasing crop yield, and supporting a multi-billion dollar recreation industry.

Other Information