

Western outdoor businesses thrive on clean, healthy rivers

Colorado Water Plan should make water conservation No. 1 priority

[By Guest Columnist](#) – Grand Junction Sentinel

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By John Le Coq

Throughout the American West, jobs and the economy are often synonymous with outdoor recreation and conservation of our natural treasures. And it's not just the companies serving tourists and recreation enthusiasts, and those located in the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains that make up the state's significant outdoor economy. Our outdoor industry includes retail trade manufacturing, tourism and much more.

In fact, outdoor recreation in Colorado generates \$31.2 billion in revenue on a yearly basis and \$994 million through taxes to our federal and state governments, according to the Outdoor Industry Association. At the core of this economic bounty lies a healthy river system, the importance of which cannot be understated. The Colorado River alone is responsible for \$26 billion from river-related activities and supports 240,000 sustainable jobs throughout the seven basin states in the West. In Colorado, river-related activities account for \$6.3 billion in direct consumer spending on recreation and sustain 80,000 recreation jobs. These figures are not small change by any measure and should be a major factor in how we shape the evolving Colorado Water Plan, the new playbook for managing water supplies in the state.

In addition, as important economically if not more, our access to world-class rivers and outdoor opportunities attracts top creative companies and talent from around the world. Protected lands and water resources are effectively growing Colorado's economy by bringing in business innovators who want the active lifestyle we offer for themselves, their employees and their customers.

I was born and raised here in Colorado and, as long as I can remember, we have been a state that embraces the ideals of the outdoor lifestyle. Because of this, we have attracted some of the most creative outdoor brands and innovative companies in the country. These companies have attracted some of the brightest talent, which in turn has generated some of the most vibrant and economically healthy communities in the nation.

As the founder and CEO of two uniquely American outdoor brands, I believe the business benefits accrued to healthy rivers is indisputable. Founded in 1999 in the high country of Colorado on my ranch under the base of the majestic Eagles Nest Wilderness area, both Fishpond and Lilypond have become worldwide brands of products designed and manufactured for the fishing and outdoor enthusiast. We have created and sustained our company with the philosophy that innovation, design and a responsibility toward the environment from which we draw our inspiration is critical to our success.

Recently I had the privilege to address the Colorado Water Conservation Board in Pueblo about what conservation of river resources means for businesses like mine and others across the state. I urged the board to make sure that a water conservation-first strategy is adopted and incorporated throughout the state water plan.

Outdoor brands, river outfitters, lodging and restaurants — businesses of all kinds that serve tourists who seek our outdoor splendor — depend on the health and sustainability of our watersheds and open lands. It is vitally important for all of us who live and work here to have accessible public lands, protected species and clean, healthy, flowing water preserved as much as possible in perpetuity. Policies such as the state water plan can go a long way to support our economy.

More than 1,100 members of the basin-wide business coalition, Protect the Flows, and many other businesses in the state, know that Colorado can meet the growing demands for water while protecting our resources, through an earnest and collaborative commitment to conservation values and sound investments in using water more efficiently.

Should we fail to address today's conservation challenges, including a smart state water plan that values healthy rivers, we face the loss of a crucial and critical driver of the economy in the American West and a uniquely Colorado set of values and traditions.

John Land Le Coq is CEO of Fishpond, a manufacturer of fishing and outdoor lifestyle products, and Lilypond, a company that specializes in outdoor gear and accessories for active women. Both companies are located in Colorado.