

Public testimony to the Colorado Water Conservation Board
Jack Bombardier - Confluence Casting LLC – 9/11/2014

Hi, my name is Jack Bombardier, and I'm a fishing guide who lives on the banks of the Upper Colorado River. I was planning on attending this meeting today and just being a fly on the wall, but was asked to say a few words on behalf of those who make their living along the Colorado and other rivers on the western slope. It not very often that the average person gets the opportunity to voice an opinion about something that's as important to them as the Colorado River is to me, so I hope that I don't blow it!

Like many others in this room, I wasn't born in Colorado. I moved here in 1986, primarily so that I could live in close proximity to its rivers and mountains. I'll bet that there are a few others here today that might be able to say the same thing. The first time that I was able to experience the Upper Colorado River was my second weekend here. I drove up into the mountains having left my map at home in Denver on the kitchen table, and just stumbled onto it, as if drawn here somehow.

For the last eleven years, I've lived fifty feet from the river, and get the opportunity to turn maybe a hundred people a year onto it. I run a small operation, but some of the outfitters in this room get the chance to expose many *hundreds* to the Colorado and the other rivers that help make this State what it is, and not Kansas. They in turn employ hundreds of others who live and work here not because of the high incomes they make doing it, but because of how much they love it, too.

I'm very glad for the existence of this Commission, and its stated goal of coming up with a comprehensive water plan for the entire State. That's because you can't just look at one river drainage or another separately, especially with the number of trans-basin diversions that are already in place. Water which should naturally flow west flows east instead, and the water that's already been grabbed is probably not coming back.

Rivers that flow west have to make due with water that isn't high enough to fill their natural channels, which results in warmer temperatures and algae and dead fish. The only way to rectify that is with more water or narrower channels, and though I'm glad to hear that Denver Water is willing consider the latter, the former would be much better!

60% of the Colorado River's water that should flow west goes east instead, and if a line is to be drawn as to when enough is enough, that's probably it.

The last few years have given us a tantalizing glimpse of what the future might hold. This year we had a robust snowpack, followed by probably the best summer we've had on the Upper Colorado River since Windy Gap was built. The previous two years flows were down, and the river was only a shadow of what it could and should be. Climate models suggest that we'll be seeing more years like those in the future. We are approaching a crossroads, if we aren't there already, where we'll have to decide whether we'll go down a sustainable path, making the best use of the resources we have, or continue to de-water some areas for the short-term benefit of others.

I've now lived more than half my life in Colorado, with more than half of that living on the Front Range. I appreciate the fact that this commission is tasked to look at the issue of water as a whole, and not in pieces. The problem is not a West Slope versus Front Range thing, everyone who lives in this State has skin in the game. Yes, it would be nice to drive through Aurora or Denver or anywhere else Kentucky Blue Grass grows during a rainstorm and not see sprinklers running. But there's water that could be better used on *this* side of the Continental Divide as well.

Irrigation uses most of the water in Colorado, and though a large percentage of it goes back into the ground table, there are improvements that could be made. Lining leaky ditches, increasing pivot irrigation, and revising water law so that water rights aren't forfeited if they aren't used are good places to start. It's also probably time to take a hard look at the amount of water that fracking consumes, and renders unusable.

On the other side of the tunnel, pricing water to reflect its *true* value would be the best way to get people to not waste it. Impacting someone's bottom line is an excellent way to get their attention. Water is the most precious commodity on the planet, and it should be treated with the reverence it deserves on *both* sides of the Continental Divide.

Now I'm nothing special as a river guide, but the place I get to share with people is *beyond* special. On a typical day, we'll see healthy wild trout, bighorn sheep, ospreys, eagles, and sometimes otters. The Upper Colorado River valley looks pretty much the same as it did when I first laid eyes on it 28 years ago. For most of its course, it flows past big contiguous ranches or

protected public land. But the whole western ecosystem and economy hinges on the water that runs through it, and trout just happen to be good bellweathers of overall river health. Without cold, clean water there are no fish, so there are no birds of prey eating the fish, and there are no people catching the fish. Without healthy flows, there won't be people having the time of their life running the Shoshone rapids, or just sitting along the banks contemplating the connectedness of it all.

In closing, to shortchange the rivers of the water that makes them what they are, is to shortchange every living thing that comes or lives here. After all, we are *all* mostly made of water, it's the one liquid that none of us can live without, whether it's sustaining our body or spirit.

So I'm very thankful that the Water Conservation Board even exists, and that I've been given the opportunity to express my thoughts about the important task you have.

Thank you

Jack Bombardier