



**GUNNISON COUNTY POSITION STATEMENT:
PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
IN GUNNISON COUNTY AND THE GUNNISON RIVER BASIN**

INTRODUCTION:

The essence of Gunnison County's ability to survive and prosper historically has been, and will continue to be, its ability to have consistent, plentiful and clean water. Like many western communities, the county has experienced a series of economic cycles. As the need arises, the community assesses itself and its future. What has consistently emerged from these exercises has been the clear recognition that the area's natural environment is its most important asset.

The future of the County is directly dependent upon the community's ability to preserve and carefully build upon its natural resource assets. Its unique and fragile setting provides an environment that attracts recreationists and tourists, supports an excellent college and an historical and valuable agricultural industry.

The natural environment is the heart of the economic and social well-being of Gunnison County, both now and in its future and water is its lifeblood.

It is upon these realities, and within the following policies, that Gunnison County establishes its position on water resources protection and development.

INTERDEPENDENCE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN GUNNISON COUNTY'S FUTURE:

It is the policy of Gunnison County to encourage the identification of opportunities for a stable and diverse economic future for Gunnison County, and to support the protection and development of water resources for in-basin purposes which will realize those opportunities in a manner that is socially, environmentally and economically sound.

It is further the policy of Gunnison County:

- To support improvement and protection of ranching, water-based recreation and access on public lands.
- To encourage the development of water-based recreation programs which will return financial benefits to landowners who make their lands available for such activities.

- To ensure adequate water is available to support future growth in Gunnison County.
- To support voluntary improvements in public access to streams on private lands through a variety of methods such as, at their discretion, landowners' providing free or compensated access on their own lands, granting short term leases, granting easements, or entering into outright sales agreements with public entities.
- To encourage the development of systems to manage fishing and rafting access to streams and address such issues as trespassing, collection of fees, litter, damage to property including livestock, and maintenance and improvements of access facilities.
- To encourage the development of recreation facilities in the county including campgrounds, picnic areas, trails, whitewater park stream access, etc. which allow a variety of recreational experiences.
- To actively cooperate with other entities in regional and national marketing of recreation opportunities in the county.

PROTECTION OF WATER RESOURCES:

It is the policy of Gunnison County that land use and other activities carried out within the County should not adversely affect the availability or suitability of water for present or future uses in the county.

It is further the policy of Gunnison County:

- To encourage protection for economically important uses of water such as retaining or enhancing the productivity of agricultural lands, meeting municipal and domestic needs, and provide optimum instream flows and lake levels for fisheries and recreation within the county.
- To protect water resources for the purpose of maintaining the high quality of the water-dependent environment in the county.
- To encourage the protection and enhancement of riparian habitat because of the value of such habitat for benefiting water quality on-site and downstream.
- To encourage increased water use efficiency and the adoption of water saving measures by domestic water providers and users.
- To encourage the use of proven traditional, and non-traditional and innovative solutions, both structural and non-structural, to protect, retain and enhance water resources in the basin.

- To consider and research unintended consequences must be considered and researched when using non-traditional and innovative solutions and technologies.
- To recognize the benefits of historical ranching and irrigation practices in the Gunnison basin in terms of recharging the aquifer. Indirect benefits include water supply for domestic wells and late season stream flows.

REGULATION OF WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT:

It is the policy of Gunnison County to fully exercise its authority to ensure that the net effect of development, management, and utilization of water resources is not to generate significant adverse environmental, social or economic impacts to the County.

It is further the policy of the County:

- To ensure that water resource development will not significantly effect the existing quality and diversity of natural ecosystems within the county, including terrestrial and aquatic organisms and their habitats.
- To Consider and mitigate impacts of changes of use of water on historic water use and benefits.
- To ensure that water resource development will not cause a significantly adverse net effect to water quality, air quality, or soils and geologic conditions in the county.
- To ensure that water resource development will not cause a significantly adverse net effect to areas of historical, archeological, geological, or ecological importance in the county.
- To ensure that the citizens of Gunnison County will not experience a reduction in quality or availability of housing or public services and facilities as a result of water resource development in the county.
- To minimize conflicts and to regulate water resource development on the basis of impact of such development on other land uses.
- To ensure that water resource development will not cause a significantly adverse net effect to any segment of the local economy or on opportunities to expand such segments of the economy in the future.
- To ensure that any water resource development will not create an undue financial burden on residents of the county.
- To encourage development which will optimize existing water supply systems and wastewater facilities.

- To require that water supply systems and wastewater treatment facilities be designed, constructed, and maintained so as to permit efficient and economic provision of public services.
- To ensure that Federal and State permit requirements for water resource management and development projects are finalized prior to, or in tandem with local permits being issued.
- To minimize the risk of Gunnison County local governments having to fund mitigation measures of water resource development.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:

It is the policy of Gunnison County to encourage and assist citizens to increase their knowledge of and participation in water resource issues.

It is further the policy of Gunnison County:

- To encourage coordination among local citizens organizations which have an interest in water resource issues.
- To encourage and support open review processes of water resource issues.
- To support public education concerning the statewide economic and environmental value of preserving the water resources of the county for use within the Gunnison basin.
- To support public education concerning increased water use efficiency.
- To support the repository at Western State College and other appropriate sites in the County for information concerning water resource development and protection issues.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

To support coordination and definition of roles and responsibilities among local government entities including local municipalities and the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District concerning water resource issues.

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

It is the policy of Gunnison County to work cooperatively with governmental entities on a regional basis on common issues related to water.

It is further the policy of Gunnison County:

- To support cooperation among and communication with headwaters counties in other basins and other entities which share mutual interests concerning the future development of water resources in Colorado.

- To work cooperatively with West Slope water districts on state and local water issues of mutual concern and benefit.
- To support cooperation among public entities, non government organizations, user groups and other interested parties throughout the Gunnison basin to ensure that the basin's water resources are used in an economically and environmentally sound manner.

STATE GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

It is the policy of Gunnison County to participate in all forums affecting the provision of water to meet out-of-basin needs or which would interfere with the ability of the county's citizens to determine the manner and extent to which the county's water resources should be used to meet its own present and future goals.

It is further the policy of Gunnison County:

- To oppose new legislation and amendments to existing Colorado law which would in any way weaken the county's ability to regulate water resource development.
- To oppose any legislation which would in any way weaken county regulatory powers.
- To oppose any state water policies or planning which would place an undue burden on the Gunnison basin to provide water to meet out-of-basin needs.
- To encourage state rule making or legislation which will place the entire burden for mitigating water quality impacts resulting from the diversion or impoundment of water resources upon the developer of such resources.
- To encourage water quality classification of streams, lakes, and reservoirs by the state which will have the effect of recognizing and protecting high quality waters in the county while not imposing an unreasonable economic burden on existing and future water users.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES:

It is the policy of Gunnison County to monitor and, when appropriate, participate in all federal legislation, regulations, policies or plans which could affect the Gunnison basin's ability to provide water necessary to meet Gunnison County's present and future needs.

It is further the policy of Gunnison County:

- To encourage the United States to fulfill its previous commitments to provide stream access and other measures to mitigate for the construction of the Aspinnall Unit of the Colorado River Storage Project.

- To support water language in proposed wilderness or wild and scenic river legislation which will provide environmental protection for the wilderness or wild and scenic river to be designated, which will require that the water right be administered and enforced in Colorado Water Court, and which will not impair present and future uses of water in the basin.
- To oppose legislation which would create a Federal water right but not require such right to be adjudicated in Colorado Water Court.
- To encourage the exercise of Federal reserved water rights in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park in a manner that would not adversely impact the present and future uses of water in the basin including the recreational use of Blue Mesa Reservoir.
- To encourage water and hydroelectric power operations of the Aspinall unit of the CRSP which would not adversely impact the present and future uses of water in the basin, the recreational use of the Curecanti National Recreation Area, the purposes of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park and the Gunnison Gorge.
- To oppose water sales and exchanges from Blue Mesa Reservoir which would adversely impact the present and future uses of water in the county, including the recreational use of the Curecanti National Recreational Area, the purposes of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, and the Gunnison Gorge.
- To support the recovery of endangered fish species in the Upper Colorado River Basin in a manner that protects historical users and does not place an unreasonable burden upon the present and future water users in the basin.

COUNTY PARTICIPATION IN OTHER WATER MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES:

It is the policy of Gunnison County to encourage and participate in the development of an in-basin water resource protection and development planning process that will ensure that the economic, social and environmental goals of the County are furthered.

Amended and Adopted this 18th day of October, 2005
by the Board of Commissioners of Gunnison County, Colorado

Jim Starr
Chairperson

Hap Channell
Vice-Chairperson

Paula Swenson
Commissioner