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## **Colorado River can't meet demand**

### **The Associated Press**

GUNNISON - Even when the drought ends, the Colorado River can't keep up with growing downstream and upstream demands, officials and water experts from both sides of the Continental Divide say.

The future of irrigated agriculture and the use of the Colorado River for development in all parts of the basin is at stake, they told the 30th Western Water Workshop at Western State University last week.

"The numbers don't add up," said Doug Kenney of the Natural Resources Law Center of the University of Colorado. "This river was in trouble before we ran into this drought."

Environmentalists have questioned the sustainability of the Colorado River for years, but Kenney is concerned because water managers have begun saying the same thing.

The demand on the Colorado River averages 15.4 million acre-feet per year, Kenney said. The long-term average flow is 14.8 million, leaving a shortfall that eventually could further deplete the two reservoirs which regulate flows - Lake Mead and Lake Powell.

Because of the prolonged drought the levels of both lakes are well below average, a source of contention between upper and lower basin states. Upper basin states, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming, are required to deliver 8.23 million acre feet annually through Lake Powell, located on the Arizona-Utah border. Lower basin states, Arizona, California and Nevada, store flows in Lake Mead, located on the Arizona-Nevada border.

In 1922 the Colorado River Compact was drafted to attempt to settle differences among the seven states, but the flows of the river were poorly understood at the time, Kenney said. Allocations - 7.5 million acre-feet to the upper basin, 7.5 million acre-feet to the lower basin and 1.5 million acre-feet to Mexico (under a 1944 treaty) - were made during a wet period when river flows were overestimated.

"It raises fundamental questions about the law of the river," Kenney said.

He warned Colorado against overdeveloping its available rights on the river, saying existing transmountain diversions could be threatened.

"We've been creative with buying 10 years here or 10 years there, but how do we stop that?" Kenney said.

Eric Kuhn, manager of the Colorado River Water Conservation District in Glenwood Springs, came up with a slightly different conclusion. Kuhn said Colorado still has not fully appropriated its share of the Colorado River, and the pressure lies with growth downstream.

"The worlds are so different between the upper basin and the lower basin, and it's going to take a lot to bridge the gap," Kuhn said.