

The Colorado River District

- was formed in 1937 to lead in the protection, conservation, use, and development of the water resources of the western slope

AND

- to safeguard for Colorado all waters of the Colorado River to which the state is entitled.





Closing the “Free River” loophole in Colorado water law



Debaere, P., Li, T., Fox, S., Bennett, K., Block, P., Hietpas, K., & others. (2024). *Closing loopholes in water rights systems to save water: The Colorado River Basin*. *Water Resources Research*, 60(8), e2023WR036667. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2023WR036667>

“Free River” Conditions



Colorado’s Constitution

Article 16:
“The right to divert the unappropriated waters of any natural stream to beneficial uses shall never be denied.”



Beneficial Use

- Agriculture
- Drinking water
- Industry
- Recreation
- Environment



Highly Variable

- Timing and amount of runoff
- Basin-by-basin differences



Snowmelt-driven System



The Colorado River District

Division 5, Colorado Division of Water Resources

*Headwaters of the
Colorado River*

- Surface water
structures with
water rights

