

River Protection Workgroup



Involving the public in protecting the natural values of selected streams while allowing water development to continue

GLOSSARY OF WATER TERMS

Abandonment of water rights: The termination of a water right in whole or in part by the court, resulting from the intent of the owner to permanently discontinue its use.

Absolute water right: A water right that has been put to a beneficial use and decreed by the water court.

Acre-foot: The volume of water equivalent to covering one acre of land to a depth of one foot; equal to 43,560 cubic feet or 325,851 gallons.

Adjudication: The judicial process through which the existence of a water right is confirmed by decree of the water court.

Appropriation: The intent or action initiated to use the waters of the state for beneficial use.

Aquifer: An underground layer consisting primarily of sand, gravel or porous rock that is capable of storing and transmitting water.

Augmentation plan: A process for junior water users to obtain dependable water supplies through court action that requires replacement of depletions to protect senior water rights.

Augmentation water: Water that is added, left, or replaced in a stream system to offset out-of-priority diversions.

Beneficial use: The use of a reasonable amount of water necessary for a specific purpose without waste.

Call (administrative call or river under administration): A request made by the owner of a water right to the Colorado Division of Water Resources, to curtail or shut off junior water rights on the same drainage to satisfy the senior water right placing the call.

Change of water right: Any change in the way that a water right is used. Changes of water right require water court approval and could include changes in point of diversion, type of use, or season of use.

Conditional water right: A water right decreed by the court based on an intent to appropriate, which establishes the priority of the right even though the water has yet to be put to use. It gives

the holder of that right time to develop the use as long as they diligently pursue completion of the project.

Consumptive use: The amount of water consumed that is no longer available as return flows to the stream.

Cubic feet per second (cfs): The basic measurement of a rate of flow for water. It is a volume measured in cubic feet passing a given point each second of time. One "cfs" is equal to 7.48 gallons per second or 448.8 gallons per minute and is sometimes referred to as "second foot".

Decree: An official document issued by the water court including, but not limited to, the priority date, amount, use, and location of the water right.

Diversion: To remove or divert and control water from its natural course.

Division engineer: The state engineer's principal water official in each of the seven water divisions.

Exempt uses: Any recognized uses that are not subject to administration under the priority system pursuant to state statute.

Exempt well: A well not subject to administration under the priority system pursuant to state statute.

Groundwater: Any water not available on the surface of the ground under natural conditions (underground water).

Headgate: A structure placed along a stream to control the flow of water from the stream into a ditch or canal.

Interstate river compacts: An agreement which sets out the terms, conditions and apportionment of waters between states.

Instream flows: A Colorado Water Conservation Board decree appropriating water for the protection or enhancement of the natural environment.

Junior water right: A relative term describing a water right with a priority less than that of a "senior right" from a common source of water.

Native waters: Surface and underground waters naturally occurring in a watershed.

Non-consumptive: Uses that do not reduce the quantity of water available to the stream system.

Non-exempt uses: Any recognized beneficial uses of water that are administered under the priority system.

Non-exempt well: A well subject to administration under the priority system.

Non-native waters: Waters imported or not originally hydrologically connected to a watershed or drainage basin.

Outstanding waters: The most protective classification of water standards under the Colorado Water Quality Control Act. Waters are not allowed any permanent degradation from manmade sources.

Over-appropriated: A term used to describe a stream system that has more decreed water rights than can be satisfied by the physical water supply.

Prior appropriation system: The process by which senior water rights are allowed to divert water before a junior water right from a common source. ("First in time, first in right.")

Priority: Established seniority for a water right. Priority is based on both the appropriation date and adjudication date of a water right, as confirmed by the water court.

Reserved rights: A water right available to the federal government to meet the intended purpose for a reservation of land.

Reservoir: A human-made structure for storage of water.

Resume: A monthly summary of water rights applications published by the water court.

Return Flow: The water that returns to the system after being beneficially used.

River basin ("basin"): The land area and water catchment surrounding a river from its headwaters to its mouth.

River call: (See definition of "Call")

Runoff: The flow of precipitation or snow melt on a natural surface course to streams.

Senior water right: A relative term describing a water right with a priority earlier than that of a "junior right" from a common source of water.

State engineer: The governor-appointed chief water official in charge of administering the waters of the state. (Director of the Colorado Division of Water Resources).

Structure: Any apparatus constructed to divert water, such as a headgate, pipe, or well.

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL): A term that represents the total pollutant a waterbody can assimilate and still meet an established water quality standard.

Transbasin diversions: A diversion of water to another basin.

Transmountain diversions: A diversion of water from one watershed to another watershed, or a diversion across the Continental Divide.

Tributary water: Water that is hydrologically connected to a natural stream system either by surface or underground flows.

Water commissioner: A state water official working under the direction of the state and division engineers, who performs the day-to-day water administration.

Water court: A branch of the district court that hears matters related to water.

Water divisions: The seven geographical areas of the state of Colorado corresponding to the major natural surface-water drainages, further subdivided into geographical divisions called water districts.

Water quality standards: Standards that describe water quality requirements and establish numeric limits for specific physical, chemical, biological or radiological characteristics of water.

Water right: A property right that conveys the right to use a particular amount of water, with a specified priority date as confirmed by the water court.

Well: Any structure or device used for the purpose of obtaining groundwater for beneficial use from an aquifer.

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