Colorado River commission reviews lessons learned from water conservation program

On Aug. 30, 2023, the Upper Colorado River Conservation District (UCRC) held its first meeting since discontinuing the water conservation program in 2018, with the goal of identifying what worked and what didn’t so the district can continue to promote water conservation.

The district has released a report detailing what it learned from the program and what improvements can be made to future programs.

Although the program’s conservation efforts are a drop in the bucket compared to the amount of water consumed in the Upper basin, UCRC officials have repeatedly said that large amounts of water cannot be saved by systems conservation alone.

Still, officials recognize that some upper basin water users want tools to help them be more water-efficient, and UCRC contractors have been out to check on the property once a month, she said it has been an easy and uncomplicated experience overall and gives it a five-star rating. UCRC contractors have been out to check on the property once a month.

“Although Cerise agrees with the criticism that the rollout of system conservation was not as smooth as expected, she said it has been an easy and uncomplicated experience overall and gives it a five-star rating. UCRC contractors have been out to check on the property once a month,” said Sarah Larsen, UCRC Deputy Director. “They physically walk the property, so I know they are managing these funds correctly,“ said. “We have been so happy and grateful.”

That means project participants in Colorado are being paid an average of about $394 for every 1,000 acre-feet of water conserved. According to UCRC Deputy Director Sara Larsen, if all the projects are completed this year, the $1 million payment will likely show a profit of about $700,000.

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The amount of water saved by upper basin system conservation is a drop in the bucket compared to the amount of water consumed in the Upper basin. In 2018, the UCRC estimated 47,000 acre-feet of water, at a cost of about $8.6 million. Last year, the UCRC conserved 3,104 acre-feet at a cost of about $7.4 million.

System conservation was first tried in the upper basin from 2015 to 2018 and saved an estimated 47,000 acre-feet of water, at a cost of about $8.6 million. Last year, the UCRC conserved 3,104 acre-feet at a cost of about $7.4 million.

Despite the success of the program, officials have said they may set a minimum requirement next time it is offered. This year, water users were asked to reduce their water use by the same amount as the previous year. Officials want to ensure that participants are serious about saving water.

“I continue to hear hesitance on the part of some of our water users to conserve water when it comes to refilling the nation’s two largest reservoirs Lake Mead and Lake Powell. We need people to continue to conserve water,” said Cullom, who is the first person in the world to have earned a Ph.D. in water and agriculture systems.

Cullom said participants also wanted firm, fixed pricing for their water. This year, the UCRC has offered a range of prices, from $100 to $500 per 1,000 acre-feet of water conserved. Participants were also asked to provide additional information about their water use, such as priority dates and decreed amounts of water.

In the future, UCRC officials said they may require participants to provide more information about their water use, such as priority dates and decreed amounts of water. This will help the district better understand the water needs of the upper basin and make more informed decisions about future conservation programs.

The UCRC will have another meeting before early October to make a decision on whether to offer system conservation again in 2024.

Colorado Commissioner Becky Mitchell was noncommittal. She said the UCRC would review the lessons learned from the program and ask for guidance about whether it should be offered again.

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