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**Public Policy Committee  
Pillar Position Statement**

**Date:** February 1, 2024

**Issue:** Water & Wastewater

**Position:**

The EDC supports inter-jurisdictional, proactive water planning that is focused on the long-term future of this valley and prioritizes funding and acquisitions that keep future development and conservation options open. The 2020 Chaffee County Comprehensive Plan points to a future where most or all of Chaffee County's water rights are needed for housing, commercial, and agricultural uses in Chaffee County and through the Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District (Upper Ark).

Strategy 1: Keep what's here, here.

- a. Advocate & assist local jurisdictions and Upper Ark to create frictionless transactional alternatives, including dedicated funds, for strategic market value purchase of surface irrigation water rights and storage as they come available. The goal is to provide a local market rate option when water rights owners need or want to sell as an alternative to buyers external to the region. The EDC's intention is not to encourage drying or sales, but to encourage the creation of a local market rate buyer.
- b. Encourage the four governments in Chaffee to deepen and create structure for collaboration and planning among each other and with Upper Ark, including respect for historical priority administration.
- c. Support agricultural producers in their work with Envision Chaffee County, Land Trusts, and Conservancy Districts, including education regarding value created by committing land and water rights to agriculture through conservation programs.

Strategy 2: Have a plan.

- a. Advocate for water planning that identifies the water uses necessary to support vibrant communities, productive agriculture, and enhancement of environmental assets.
- b. Encourage and support local government in development, implementation, and updating of near- and long-term municipal, augmentation, commercial, industrial, and agricultural water use and wastewater planning.

Strategy 3: Smart water growth.

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- a. Advocate for water and wastewater policies that ensure services to meet our current and future housing, business needs of the local economy, and residents to support year-round job growth.
  - b. Encourage investment in water and wastewater infrastructure needed to meet Chaffee's growing economy.
  - c. Advocate for innovation, intentional outdoor water use, and technology to lower water usage and increase efficiency.

### **Rationale for Position:**

Simply said, water – in all forms – is the lifeblood of western communities. Park County's water history is a cautionary tale, where water right exports have made a permanent and marked change to the economic and environmental landscape - when the water rights are gone, they're gone for good, taking development and conservation options off the table permanently.

Chaffee County communities must plan for and implement long-term water security to grow a resilient and vibrant economy. Chaffee is in the unique position - there are presently enough senior in-County water rights to meet growth and agricultural conservation objectives for today and future generations. Securing Chaffee and Upper Ark's water future is a precursor to all other priorities.

Water and wastewater projects take years and even decades to develop. Reliable access to water and wastewater services to support our growing economy requires foresight, planning and implementation.

### **Background:**

Article 16 of our Colorado Constitution established "first in time, first in right" and "beneficial use" touchstones. During most years, all the irrigation season flow in the Arkansas River is spoken for by water rights appropriated in the late 1800's. Agree or not, this is our prior appropriation system.

Reliable water supplies for beneficial uses are a critical component for economic sustainability of communities. Our economy and communities were birthed in the mid- to late-1800's on the banks of Cottonwood Creek, Chalk Creek, Browns Creek, the Little River, and the mighty Arkansas. As times have changed water has been the key driver of our recreational/tourism economy. Into the future, water will support our housing needs, growing businesses, and productive agriculture. Ensuring recreational access, and preserving flows, is critical to sustaining our economy.

Prior appropriation creates constraints in some cases but can also provide great certainty. Our primary risk is growing interest in Chaffee's senior water from the

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Front Range driven by dwindling aquifers north of Colorado Springs and uncertainty on the Colorado River. By securing Chaffee's senior water rights for in-County and Upper Ark use, we can guarantee those water rights continue to support vibrant town and agricultural economies, healthy ecosystems, and beautiful landscape for future generations.

Water matters can be complex and involve numerous interests. Thankfully, Chaffee has a shared vision: "keep the town, town, and country, country." By focusing on shared objectives among all stakeholders and respecting water rights as property rights, Chaffee can secure its water future. The alternative is internal squabble and hand wringing while Chaffee's water future is bought by Front Range bidders.

### Dig in Deeper:

Learn more about water in Chaffee by exploring these resources.

- Buena Vista:
  - [2021 Water Resources Master Plan](#)
  - [2023 Water Allocation Policy](#)
- Salida:
  - [Salida Water Home Page](#)
  - [2023 Water Quality Report](#)
- Poncha:
  - [Poncha Water Notices](#)
  - [Poncha Sewer Website](#)
- County:
  - [Upper Arkansas Water Conservancy District](#)
  - [Geology & Groundwater Resources of Chaffee County](#)
  - [USGS Buena Vista-Salida Groundwater Report, 2011](#)
  - [Data for Improved Water Management in Colorado's Arkansas River Basin](#)
  - [USGS Sustainability of Upper Arkansas River Groundwater, 2005](#)
  - [Voluntary Flow Management Program](#)
  - [Article\\_Heart of the Rockies\\_ Chaffee Groundwater Study](#)
- State
  - [Interactive Map of CO resources](#)
  - [Colorado Division of Water Resources](#)
  - [Geocortex Map](#)
  - [Colorado's Decision Support Systems](#)
  - [Water Education Colorado](#)
  - [ARKANSAS BASIN ROUNDTABLE](#)