SLIDES: The Yampa: New Rules for an Old River

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The Yampa: New Rules for an Old River

• Colorado’s last wild, free flowing river now must be tamed to take care of fish, kayakers, and people, of course.
The Yampa
New Rules For An Old River
The Yampa River

- Colorado’s Yampa River is a place of unimaginable bounty
- Nearly 1.5 million acre feet in flows at the Maybell gage, fewer than 36,000 people
- 250 miles east lies the Front Range, with roughly the same amount of water and about 3.6 million people
- That’s what urban thirst looks like.
Taming the Yampa

Colorado's far-flung Yampa River Basin is being brought into the state's water regulation regime, in part to help assure water for kayak courses and endangered fish, and to prepare for the day when the water of the scarcely populated Yampa Basin, may be tapped for the Front Range or other water short areas.

*Based on flows at Utah state line. **Moffat and Routt counties, from U.S. Census 2006 estimates ***Based on native flow calculations from the Colorado Division of Water Resources.

Source: Colorado Division of Water Resources
Thirst Looks West

• Colorado’s second largest utility floating proposal for a $4 billion, 227-mile pipeline from Maybell to Front Range.

• Yampa Basin, at this point, feels like Colorado did when California came to discuss the Colorado River Compact in 1922.
$4 billion water proposal

Lawmakers toured northwestern Colorado on Wednesday, studying a proposal to take water from the Yampa and pump it back to the Front Range. The idea has drawn fire from environmentalists who say the river would be harmed and from some West Slope interests who want the Front Range to tap farm water supplies instead of high-country sources. Under one scenario, water would be piped from Maybell to Barr Lake, northeast of Denver.
To Talk or Not to Talk

- Front Range will take the water if we don’t talk.
- Front Range will take the water if we do.
- Both poised to FILE for a new water right on the river.
- Now at a standoff.
Then came the BLM

- Agency conducting wild and scenic river studies as part of its mandated review of land management plans.
- Portions of the Yampa close to being flagged as wild and scenic
- Portions of the Colorado also under study, though not as far along.
Wild and Scenic Talks

• Portions under study include streams critical to Front Range supplies
• Designation of the Little Snake could stop any future Yampa Projects.
• How Long Colorado’s last wild place will stay wild is unclear.
NRLC Water Presentation Summary from Jerd Smith:

**New Rules for an Old River**

Colorado’s Yampa River is a place of unimaginable bounty in the water-strapped American West. To this day, anyone can walk up to its banks and take water from the stream. It is the only river in Colorado that still enjoys this freedom and one of the few in the West that remains untamed.

At least for now. Soon, the times of plenty here will end. In recent months state regulators have begun the arduous task of administering the Yampa, measuring who takes how much water and when. At the same time the pressures to protect its endangered fish and wild lands are rising even as the watershed is targeted by the thirsty Front Range, hundreds of miles away.

In the years to come, pressure on water supplies throughout the West will play out in places like the Yampa, as federal land managers scramble to protect scenic stream segments and utilities fight to preserve their inalienable right to divert water.