

## Our Problem with Water

Our “water agencies”, Utah’s Division of Water Resources (DWR) and the Washington County Water Conservancy District (WCWCD), have the best intentions. They have done a terrific job providing reliable, safe, plentiful and cheap water. Due to our growth, our prodigious water use, and the dramatic change in Colorado Plateau precipitation, “plentiful and cheap” is ending.

[A legislative audit](#)<sup>1</sup> determined Utah’s water data was too inaccurate to help plot a solution. The DWR is working to fix that, and the [2015 Municipal & Industrial Water Use Report](#)<sup>2</sup> is an honest and fundamental start, but its scope excludes some key issues: agricultural water use, water right security, water use targets and water management practices.

The WCWCD repeated these claims in several recent public messages<sup>3</sup> without factual references and refusing open, public analysis:

Claim 1: *We need the Lake Powell Pipeline.* The real need is enough water to enable growth.

The LPP is a proposed solution to that need. It should not be accepted without an open assessment and discussion of the risks and affordability.

Claim 2: *We need a second water source.* It would be nice, but it’s not necessary, and the risk and expense may make it unwise.

Claim 3: *We reduced our water use by 1 billion gallons over 5 years.* A good start, but only a 1% reduction, small compared to other states<sup>4</sup>.

Claim 4: *We use less than 60% of other Utah counties.* As they themselves have said, disparities in the types of water use and demographics make direct comparisons invalid. No analysis was provided to adjust for these disparities. We compare poorly to other urbanized Utah counties, and very poorly to conscientious southwest communities<sup>5</sup>.

Claim 5: *This is in spite of our county being the hottest and driest in the state.* Dryness is a reason to use the least water, not the most.

Claim 6: *\$60M was spent on saving water.* An analysis<sup>6</sup> of these expenses shows they were not on spent high-impact, low cost targets (e.g., building code changes, water budgeting, tiered pricing, informative billing).

The unmentioned fact: the LPP might not be built, and we aren’t ready with an alternative. The WCWCD is selling the LPP to taxpayers: “We’re trying hard to save water, we’re doing great, we need the LPP. Buy it.” No factual basis is offered. The 12-year, \$33M (and counting) LPP study lacks open consideration of issues and alternatives. Conserve Southwest Utah has been researching and questioning the LPP, advocating improved water management throughout that period, largely met with silence. The key issues are:

**Water Demand:** Our water agencies obscure our unsustainable water use by not setting reasonable targets based on achievements elsewhere, not recognizing changes in the Colorado watershed, and not implementing a comprehensive Water Management Plan<sup>12</sup> to manage our water supply and demand in the manner necessary to meet the challenge. Statewide, roughly 80% water is used in agriculture (largely water-intensive alfalfa for cattle feed, much of it exported), 10% on landscapes (mostly grass yards and golf courses), 5% inside homes, 5% in businesses<sup>2</sup>. Washington County uses less on agriculture and more on grass, trying to look like the Midwest instead of the desert. The WCWCD is sending a false message that we’re doing great and spending wisely on conservation. Our analysis<sup>6</sup> shows spending is not focused on high-yield projects.

**Water Supply:** Data on our local water supply is lacking, but [our analysis](#)<sup>7</sup> indicates we have enough local water to support our growth with just modest conservation. And an analysis of [Utah’s Use of its Colorado River Allocation](#)<sup>8</sup> indicates we’re likely already using it all. [The](#)

[state's own records of our Colorado River usage](#)<sup>9</sup> indicate usage of about twice our lawful allocation (of 1.38 MAFY – Million Acre-Feet Yearly) has been approved, and that allocation is unrealistic, based on the 1922 Colorado River Compact assumptions on river flows. The LPP's water right appears low in priority, at high risk of being pre-empted by older, more senior rights as demand increases and flows decrease. As our water agencies declare the LPP's water right "the most secure on the river", there is no analysis supporting that, and nobody in authority has even asked for it.

## **Economics**

The financial risk to Washington County's economy is significant. The governor appointed an [Executive Water Finance Board](#)<sup>10</sup> to evaluate the risks and alternatives. The [Economists' Report](#)<sup>11</sup> submitted to the Board found the WCWCD's financial analysis to be flawed and unrealistic. They proposed an open public technical review; the WCWCD refused. There is no analysis of "affordability". We trust the board will force this analysis.

## **The Alternative: Improved Management of Our Local Water**<sup>7</sup>

This really isn't an alternative: it must be done, sooner or later. While our analysis<sup>7</sup> indicates there is much more usable water in the county than our water agencies choose to recognize, it also indicates we can easily cut our water use without impacting our landscaping's visual appeal, the viability of our agriculture, or our population and economic growth. Water budgeting, a system of establishing a usage budget for each property based on its use and landscaping, combined with ordinances defining reasonable desert landscaping, have reduced water use by 50% in other vibrant, growing southwest communities. A cost-benefit-driven [Water Management Plan](#)<sup>12</sup>, integrated across the "supply chain" (wholesale and retail) including both supply and demand, would be much more effective than current management/planning practices. These efforts can be undertaken at a fraction of the cost of the LPP, incrementally, avoiding huge financing costs, with low risk. It can support our projected growth.

Our water agencies and elected representatives certainly do not support the LPP unconditionally, yet they won't state (or don't know) under what conditions they support it. Our work with them to reveal and assess their conditions is going much too slow. Instead, the LPP is being pushed and marketed with blinders, while improving management of our local water is given much talk and little action. We need an open public analysis and honest dialog.

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Board President, Conserve Southwest Utah

Send questions/comments to [board@conserveswu.org](mailto:board@conserveswu.org)

## References:

<sup>1</sup> [https://le.utah.gov/audit/15\\_01rpt.pdf](https://le.utah.gov/audit/15_01rpt.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://water.utah.gov/2015WaterData.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://mailchi.mp/901cd6a9f057/washington-county-water-use-update>, <http://www.wcwcd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2015-Water-Use-Numbers.pdf>, <https://www.stgeorgeutah.com/news/archive/2018/06/27/mgk-srr-washington-county-has-decreased-water-use-by-over-1-billion-gallons-officials-say/#.WzTphqdKjIV>, <https://www.stgeorgeutah.com/news/archive/2018/07/04/srr-southern-utah-without-lake-powell-pipeline-dried-up-communities-or-booming-like-usual/#.Wz0RqxZuiEc>, <https://www.thespectrum.com/story/opinion/2018/07/08/my-turn-lake-powell-pipeline-critical-our-region/766348002/>, <https://lpputah.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f4e6df5fa32ef5f7774b93eac&id=2014bb9fa3&e=5845e4fb52>

- <sup>4</sup><https://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/1441/circ1441.pdf> and  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/25/americans-are-conserving-water-like-never-before-according-to-the-latest-federal-data/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.145f4a902070&wpisrc=nl\\_energy202&wpmm=1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/25/americans-are-conserving-water-like-never-before-according-to-the-latest-federal-data/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.145f4a902070&wpisrc=nl_energy202&wpmm=1)
- <sup>5</sup><http://conserve.wu.org/wp-content/uploads/Comparison-of-GPCD-Water-Usage-across-the-West.pdf>
- <sup>6</sup><https://conserve.wu.org/wp-content/uploads/Water-Management-Plan-Project-Accounting-rev-1.xlsx>
- <sup>7</sup><http://conserve.wu.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/WRA-Alternative-LPP-full-report-20121.pdf>; see page 5 for local water supply estimate
- <sup>8</sup><https://conserve.wu.org/wp-content/uploads/Utahs-Use-of-its-Colorado-River-Allocation.xlsx>
- <sup>9</sup><https://www.waterrights.utah.gov/distinfo/colorado/WRPriorityDDview.asp>
- <sup>10</sup><https://www.utah.gov/pmn/sitemap/publicbody/6077.html>
- <sup>11</sup><https://www.utah.gov/pmn/files/404229.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup><https://conserve.wu.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Nature-of-Water-Conservation-Planning.docx>