



Testimony
Tom Easley, Director of Programs
The Rocky Mountain Climate Organization
Before the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee
February 12, 2009
Senate Bill 09-125
Concerning the Funding of Colorado Water Conservation Board Projects, and Making Appropriations in Connection Therewith

On behalf of the Rocky Mountain Climate Organization (RMCO), I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 09-125, as it is consistent with the November 2007 recommendations of the blue-ribbon Climate Action Panel (CAP) that RMCO convened to develop ways to reduce our state's contributions and vulnerabilities to climate change. Governor Ritter has adopted as state policy the emission-reduction goals recommended by the Climate Action Panel. RMCO now supports actions to reach those goals, including both the action items in Governor Ritter's Colorado Climate Action Plan and the other actions recommended by the CAP.

First, though, some background on RMCO and our Climate Action Panel. RMCO is a mainstream coalition with 43 partner organizations, including 17 local governments, Colorado's largest water provider, 13 businesses, and 12 nonprofit organizations. We work to keep the West a special place by reducing climate disruption and its effects here.

RMCO convened the Climate Action Panel to recommend actions to reduce Colorado's contribution and vulnerability to climate change. Patterned after projects to develop climate action agendas in other states, including many in the West, the Climate Action Panel was the first in the nation to be convened by a non-profit organization. We designated as Project Directors Mayors John Hickenlooper of Denver, Doug Hutchinson of Fort Collins, and Steve Burkholder of Lakewood; Summit County Commissioner Tom Long; Matt Baker of Environment Colorado; former Senator Gary Hart, now at the University of Colorado-Denver; Gail Klapper of the Colorado Forum; Pat Vincent of Xcel Energy; and Al Yates, the former president of Colorado State University. The Project Directors then appointed 34 leaders from the state's public, private, and non-profit sectors to serve on the Climate Action Panel. Additional experts and representatives of various sectors in the state assisted the panel by participating in six Policy Work Groups that developed draft recommendations for the consideration of the full panel. Altogether, considering members and alternates of the panel and the Policy Work Groups, 116 Coloradans worked for a year to develop the panel's recommendations.

The CAP recommended 70 actions to be taken in Colorado, consisting of 55 recommendations to reduce heat-trapping greenhouse gases (GHGs) and 15 recommendations to prepare the state for the changes that may be coming. Fourteen of those 15 adaptation recommendations outline a road map for dealing with the projected effects of climate change on the state's water supplies, which may well amount to Colorado's greatest vulnerability to climate change. Nine of those water adaptation recommendations are relevant to SB 09-125. The year-long process built a strong consensus, with 61 of the 70 recommendations agreed to

unanimously, with seven others agreed to by super-majority votes (with five or fewer dissents). The Panel's full report is available at www.coloradoclimate.org.

The centerpieces of the CAP recommendations and the official Colorado Climate Action Plan that Governor Ritter announced right after the panel's report are identical: As recommended by the our panel, Governor Ritter adopted as state policy goals of reducing Colorado's emissions of greenhouse gases 20% by 2020 and 80% by 2050, compared to 2005 levels. Achieving the 2020 goal will require a 37% reduction in the emissions that are forecast to otherwise occur that year under laws and practices in effect in September 2007.

To continue the consensus-building success of the CAP, RMCO is now in the second stage of the Colorado Climate Project, in which we are continuing to work with diverse organizations and interests to flesh out details for implementation of the CAP recommendations, to build broad public support for those recommendations and also for the Governor's Climate Action Plan, and to get them adopted.

Among those efforts is a Water Initiative focused on the actions needed to get the CAP's 14 water adaptation recommendations, many of which are also in the Governor's Plan, considered and adopted. To guide the initiative we have convened a steering committee comprised of experts from the largest municipal water providers, the Colorado River Water Conservation District, the Western Water Assessment housed at the University of Colorado, private sector engineering and climate science firms, the legal community, and conservation organizations. While diverse in their viewpoints, they share the common goal of protecting our precious water resources from the projected effects of climate change.

Those threats are described in CWCB's 2008 "Climate Change in Colorado" report, which itself reflects the CAP recommendation numbered WA-5, calling for a report on the state of scientific knowledge about climate change and its effects on Colorado resources. The challenges are immense: reduced snowpack and streamflow, more drought, earlier snowmelt, intense storm events, increased irrigation needs and other consumptive uses, degraded water quality, increasing contention on interstate compact allocations, loss of aquatic and riparian habitat, and secondary water resource impacts such as more forest fires and forest beetle infestations.

Of particular concern are impacts on the Colorado River basin, which according to the National Academy of Sciences has heated up more than any other part of the contiguous United States. Our analysis last year showed that in 2003-2007 the average temperature in the basin was 2.2°F warmer than the 20th century average-compared to 1.0°F warmer for the world. According to the CWCB climate change report, those studies project average basin runoff decreases from 6% to 20% by 2050 compared to 20th century conditions.

So the stakes are high, and that is the reason we are testifying in support of SB 09-125. Many of its provisions are directly related to nine of our panel's water adaptation recommendations, all of which were adopted unanimously. The comprehensive nature of the bill's provisions for funding CWCB programs and initiatives satisfies the CAP recommendation numbered WA-1, calling for officials with water responsibilities to exercise leadership in addressing the causes of and adapting to the effects of climate change on the state's water resources.

The bill's provisions more specifically relate to the CAP recommendations as follows:

- The Section 5 funding for water adaptation partnership projects corresponds with many of the CAP recommendations.
 - Funding for climate data collection systems, including upgrades to SNOTEL sites operated by NRCS, installation of new streamflow gages, and new new CoAgMet climate/evapotranspiration stations is consistent with CAP recommendation WA-5 calling for assessment and funding for

data collection systems. Since the CAP recommendation was focused on more federal funding, we would hope that the CWCB would consider leveraging such investments to negotiate additional federal funds.

- Funds to scrutinize and detecting bias in climate change models would support CAP recommendation WA-6 to do basin-by-basin regional modeling by downscaling existing models and creating new ones.
- Funding new partnerships to ensure new data is useful at the local planning level also would support CAP recommendation WA-6 for regional modeling and also recommendation WA-2, which calls for state assistance to local water providers that lack resources needed to consider the effects of climate change.
- Funds to publish information would enable CWCB to follow up on its 2008 climate change report with more specific assessment and quantification of climate change impacts on various water-dependent resources, as called for in CAP recommendation WA-5. It would also support CAP recommendation WA-10, regarding state government participating in multi-interest information exchanges.
- Funds to calculate specific impacts to water rights, including instream flow water rights, would support CAP recommendation WA-11, calling for evaluation of the instream flow program in relation to the effects of climate change.

Since funding the full range of projects that CWCB staff has identified as potential ways to accomplish all of these purposes far exceeds the requested appropriation (\$3.2 million in total estimated costs compared to the \$500,000 request), there is an obvious need to prioritize them. RMCO is anxious to participate in a stakeholder group to help CWCB staff do so, and to help with more detailed planning of the selected projects.

- The Section 16 funding for Phase 2 of the Colorado River Water Availability Study is a critical next step. CAP recommendation WA-3 called for consideration of climate change in that study, and continued funding will be essential to ensure that model development is complete and thorough.
- In Section 4, the bill would continue funding for the alternative agriculture water transfer sustainability grant program. This program is consistent with CAP recommendation WA-8 to develop and fund operating agreements that minimize the disruption of agricultural economies as water is transferred to from agricultural to urban uses.
- In Section 10, the bill would continue funding for the watershed restoration program. This program is consistent with CAP recommendation WA-12, which calls for state government to consider ways to enhance the protection of aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

To conclude, is very much in support of SB 09-125, as it includes a comprehensive set of projects that would help prepare the state for the critical changes facing our most precious resource.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our testimony.