

C4 Water Committee

Over the next couple of months the C4 Water Committee will focus on three primary efforts:

1. Determine current and potentially creative ways to keep adequate water in Custer County and manage water usage in support of the Custer County Master Plan;
2. Working with city, county and state organizations, both public and private, understand the current status of water in Custer County—amount, location, availability, quality, usage and district water-court cases; and,
3. Carefully consider current and future water augmentation proposals and develop a C4 position on them.

In each of the above efforts the C4 Water Committee intends to identify potential impacts to ranchers, developers and the general population of Custer County (the majority of the people). In addition, the time element will be carefully factored into research, analysis and future position papers—present, near-term and far-term impacts.

Water is a business...big business in many places, especially in Colorado. Custer County is unique because it is a SOURCE of water that is sought by many cities and states. Individuals as well as public and private organizations continue to deal in water for altruistic reasons and for profit. It appears that the majority of the population of Custer County is unaware of the value and significance of the clean, fresh mountain water available here. The C4 Water Committee is dedicated to preserving Custer County's precious resource—water.

Every community action related to building, development and overall growth is tied to the availability and use of water. Each existing or proposed subdivision, private utility district, minor subdivision, planned unit development, or cluster development is tremendously affected by the availability and use of water within the County. In fact the decision to provide necessary water to these existing and proposed developments is a make or break issue for all. Therefore, C4 believes that County government officials must make water considerations paramount in every land use decision.

The C4 Water Committee is dedicated to researching and analyzing the issues associated with water and making this information available to the public so the majority of citizens can make an informed decision. In addition, most, if not all, of the water issues in Custer County are decided in the District Water Court in Pueblo, Colorado; however, the initial decisions made by the State Engineer have a significant impact on the material that is provided to the Water Court. Members of the C4 Water Committee intend to be present and report on water issues before the court.

C4 Water Committee Members Include:

Wiley Larson
Lockett Pittman
Bet Kettle
Paul Snyder
Bob Senderhauf

C4 Water Committee

County Commissioners, Custer County Colorado, Westcliffe Co 81252

Subject: Position Paper on the Upper Arkansas Water Conservation District's Proposed Water Augmentation Plan for Custer County

Problem: Determine the adequacy, advantages and disadvantages of the subject proposal for Custer County.

Points to consider:

- Water availability at a reasonable price is the lifeblood of agriculture in Custer County.
- In Custer County approximately 80% of water is used for agricultural purposes.
- The complete proposed UAWCD Water Augmentation Plan for Custer County has not yet been made publicly available for scrutiny.
- Today, for example, a 35 acre lot is allocated one acre-foot of water for indoor and outdoor use (in some cases).
- A water source providing 1-2 cubic feet per second (cfs) can supply a complete town like Salida (about 5500 residents) with necessary water. One cfs generates about 2 acre feet of water per day.

Decision criteria and analysis table:

Decision Criteria	Analysis Required
The amount of water being augmented is reasonable.	Yes
The source and source location of the water being augmented is acceptable.	Yes
The usage of the proposed water augmentation is clearly identified.	Yes
To what extent does the new water augmentation plan accommodate existing augmentation plans for existing subdivisions?	Yes
Advantages and disadvantages of the water augmentation have been identified and are acceptable to ranchers.	Yes
Advantages and disadvantages of the water augmentation is acceptable to developers.	Yes
Advantages and disadvantages of the water augmentation is acceptable to the general population of Custer County.	Yes
The organization controlling the usage of the augmented water is acceptable to the general population.	Yes
The present impact of the proposed water augmentation on the environment and current water rights is acceptable.	Yes
The near- and far-term impacts of the proposed water augmentation are understood and acceptable to the majority of the population of Custer County.	Yes

- The criteria above will be used to assess the proposed UAWCD Water Augmentation Plan for Custer County.
- The Water Augmentation Plan will be assessed by the C4 Water Committee working with water experts from Custer County and the State.
- A red-green-yellow format will be used to display results of the C4 assessment: red means critical issue, green means acceptable and yellow means strong mixed responses occurred

Discussion: The details of the proposed UAWCD Water Augmentation Plan for Custer County are not yet known or understood. The detailed plan has not been released for public scrutiny, nor has it been considered by the district water court. It is important to understand the advantages and disadvantages that could be possible with such an augmentation.

On one hand, the augmentation may require the purchase of significant acreage located in Custer County with major water rights by the UAWCD. The individual property owner, potentially a rancher, may benefit financially from the sale. Ten years ago, an acre-foot of clean mountain water, like we have here in Custer County, sold for about \$5000 and today that same water could sell for \$20,000. In order for the UAWCD to use the water rights purchased, they must reduce water usage on the property purchased and apply that water to another use. This could potentially “brown” the property having the water rights.

From a rancher’s standpoint the sale of his/her property may improve their personal financial situation. From the point of view of other ranchers, the augmented water may be available to them for agricultural purposes, although, if the past is any indication of the future, the augmented water would be too expensive for agricultural use. In addition, if the augmentation plan provides for strict regulation of water use in the County, the augmented water could be sold to those individuals, ranchers and organizations that are currently using water out of priority and without proper water court permission, so they could replenish the water obtained from senior water-right owners.

From a developer’s perspective the augmented water could be used to further develop the County, bringing people and commerce to the County. This action could potentially increase the tax base and help existing and new businesses grow; however, according to recent CSU studies, rural residential development actually costs the County money—about \$1.30 for every \$1.00 in tax revenue.

The majority of the general population of Custer County is not directly tied to the ranching or development communities. However, many of the people living in the County remain in the County to enjoy the clean, fresh environment, incredible views, open spaces, and the agricultural look and feel.

All groups, the entire population of Custer County, should be given the opportunity to review the facts associated with the proposed UAWCD Water Augmentation Plan, determine the benefits and issues associated with the plan, and make their own decision.

C4 Position: Work with the Upper Arkansas Water Conservation District to get their completed plan out to the public so it can be researched and analyzed appropriately. Further, no decision about the proposed augmentation plan should be made until proper analysis is completed.