

First Regular Session  
Seventy-fourth General Assembly  
STATE OF COLORADO

INTRODUCED

LLS NO. 23-0333.01 Jennifer Berman x3286

HOUSE BILL 23-1220

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HOUSE SPONSORSHIP

Holtorf and McCormick, Bockenfeld

SENATE SPONSORSHIP

(None),

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House Committees

Agriculture, Water & Natural Resources

Senate Committees

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A BILL FOR AN ACT

101 CONCERNING A STUDY REGARDING THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE  
102 ELIMINATION OF LARGE-CAPACITY GROUNDWATER  
103 WITHDRAWAL WITHIN THE REPUBLICAN RIVER BASIN, AND, IN  
104 CONNECTION THEREWITH, REQUIRING THE COLORADO WATER  
105 CENTER TO CONDUCT THE STUDY AND REPORT ITS FINDINGS AND  
106 CONCLUSIONS TO CERTAIN LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES.

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Bill Summary

*(Note: This summary applies to this bill as introduced and does not reflect any amendments that may be subsequently adopted. If this bill passes third reading in the house of introduction, a bill summary that applies to the reengrossed version of this bill will be available at <http://leg.colorado.gov>.)*

In 1942, Colorado entered into an interstate compact (compact)

Shading denotes HOUSE amendment. Double underlining denotes SENATE amendment.  
Capital letters or bold & italic numbers indicate new material to be added to existing law.  
Dashes through the words or numbers indicate deletions from existing law.

with Nebraska and Kansas regarding the allocation of water from the Republican river basin (basin). Colorado ratified the compact in 1943. In 2016, Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas signed a resolution (resolution) regarding a dispute about Colorado's compliance with the compact, through which resolution and its amendment Colorado agreed to retire 25,000 acres of irrigated acreage in the basin by 2029.

The bill requires the Colorado water center (center) in the Colorado state university to study the anticipated economic effects of the forced elimination of groundwater withdrawals within and surrounding the Colorado portion of the Republican river basin that could occur if Colorado fails to comply with the resolution. The center is required to prepare a progress report and, on or before January 1, 2026, a final report of the center's findings and conclusions from the study and to post both reports on the center's website. The center must present the progress and final reports to certain legislative committees.

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1 *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Colorado:*

2           **SECTION 1.** In Colorado Revised Statutes, **add** 23-31-804 as  
3 follows:

4           **23-31-804. Republican river groundwater economic study -**  
5 **reporting - legislative declaration - definitions - repeal.** (1) THE  
6 GENERAL ASSEMBLY FINDS AND DECLARES THAT:

7           (a) IN 1942, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY RATIFIED THE REPUBLICAN  
8 RIVER COMPACT, AN INTERSTATE COMPACT BETWEEN COLORADO,  
9 NEBRASKA, AND KANSAS REGARDING THE ALLOCATION OF WATER AMONG  
10 THE THREE STATES FROM THE REPUBLICAN RIVER;

11           (b) VARIOUS DISAGREEMENTS AND LITIGATION HAVE ARISEN  
12 AMONG THE THREE STATES REGARDING THE USE OF WATER AS ALLOCATED  
13 BY THE COMPACT;

14           (c) IN 2016, COLORADO, NEBRASKA, AND KANSAS, ACTING  
15 THROUGH THE REPUBLICAN RIVER COMPACT ADMINISTRATION, ADOPTED  
16 A SERIES OF RESOLUTIONS RESOLVING VARIOUS DISPUTES AMONG THE  
17 THREE STATES;

1 (d) UNDER THE TERMS OF ONE OF THE RESOLUTIONS, COLORADO  
2 AGREED TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF ACRES IRRIGATED WITHIN AN AREA  
3 OF THE REPUBLICAN RIVER BASIN KNOWN AS THE SOUTH FORK FOCUS  
4 ZONE BY TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND ACRES BY DECEMBER 31, 2029, WHICH  
5 ACTION IS A SOLEMN OBLIGATION OF THE STATE;

6 (e) IF COLORADO FAILS TO MEET ITS OBLIGATION UNDER THE  
7 TERMS OF THE SOUTH FORK FOCUS ZONE RESOLUTION, THE STATE  
8 ENGINEER COULD BE REQUIRED TO CURTAIL ALL GROUNDWATER USE  
9 SUBJECT TO THE REPUBLICAN RIVER COMPACT; AND

10 (f) IT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE COLORADO WATER CENTER TO  
11 STUDY THE ECONOMIC IMPACT THAT WILL RESULT IF COLORADO FAILS TO  
12 MEET ITS OBLIGATION UNDER THE TERMS OF THE SOUTH FORK FOCUS ZONE  
13 RESOLUTION AND THE STATE ENGINEER IS THEN REQUIRED TO CURTAIL ALL  
14 LARGE-CAPACITY GROUNDWATER WITHDRAWALS WITHIN THE REPUBLICAN  
15 RIVER BASIN.

16 (2) AS USED IN THIS SECTION, UNLESS THE CONTEXT OTHERWISE  
17 REQUIRES:

18 (a) "AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEES" MEANS THE HOUSE OF  
19 REPRESENTATIVES AGRICULTURE, WATER, AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
20 COMMITTEE AND THE SENATE AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
21 COMMITTEE, OR THEIR SUCCESSOR COMMITTEES.

22 (b) NOTWITHSTANDING SECTION 23-31-801 (1), "COLORADO  
23 WATER CENTER" OR "CENTER" MEANS THE INSTITUTE.

24 (c) "LARGE-CAPACITY GROUNDWATER WITHDRAWAL" MEANS THE  
25 LAWFUL ABILITY TO WITHDRAW WATER IN AN AMOUNT OF MORE THAN  
26 FIFTY GALLONS PER MINUTE FROM A WELL.

27 (d) "REPUBLICAN RIVER BASIN" HAS THE MEANING SET FORTH IN

1 SECTION 37-50-102 (5).

2 (e) "SOUTH FORK FOCUS ZONE RESOLUTION" OR "RESOLUTION"  
3 MEANS THE 2016 REPUBLICAN RIVER COMPACT ADMINISTRATION  
4 RESOLUTION SIGNED BY THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE REPUBLICAN RIVER  
5 COMPACT ADMINISTRATION ON AUGUST 24, 2016, IN WHICH THE STATE  
6 AGREED TO RETIRE TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND ACRES OF ITS IRRIGATED  
7 LANDS WITHIN THE SOUTH FORK FOCUS ZONE OF THE REPUBLICAN RIVER  
8 BASIN, AND SUBSEQUENT RESOLUTIONS AMENDING THE TERMS OF THE  
9 RESOLUTION.

10 (f) "STATE ENGINEER" MEANS THE STATE ENGINEER APPOINTED BY  
11 THE GOVERNOR PURSUANT TO SECTION 37-80-101.

12 (g) "WATER RESOURCES AND AGRICULTURE REVIEW COMMITTEE"  
13 MEANS THE WATER RESOURCES AND AGRICULTURE REVIEW COMMITTEE  
14 CREATED IN SECTION 37-98-102 (1)(a)(I).

15 (3) ON OR BEFORE JANUARY 1, 2026, THE COLORADO WATER  
16 CENTER SHALL COMPLETE A STUDY OF THE ECONOMIC IMPACT THAT WILL  
17 RESULT IF COLORADO FAILS TO MEET ITS OBLIGATION UNDER THE TERMS  
18 OF THE SOUTH FORK FOCUS ZONE RESOLUTION AND THE STATE ENGINEER  
19 IS THEN REQUIRED TO CURTAIL ALL LARGE-CAPACITY GROUNDWATER  
20 WITHDRAWALS WITHIN THE REPUBLICAN RIVER BASIN. IN CONDUCTING  
21 THE STUDY, THE COLORADO WATER CENTER SHALL EXAMINE THE  
22 ECONOMIC IMPACT TO THE AREAS OF COLORADO, NEBRASKA, AND  
23 KANSAS AFFECTED BY THE REPUBLICAN RIVER BASIN.

24 (4) THE CENTER SHALL:

25 (a) PREPARE A PROGRESS REPORT OF THE STUDY CONDUCTED  
26 PURSUANT TO THIS SECTION AND PRESENT THE PROGRESS REPORT TO A  
27 JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEES DURING THE JOINT

1 COMMITTEE'S 2025 HEARING HELD PURSUANT TO SECTION 2-7-203 OF THE  
2 "SMART ACT", PART 2 OF ARTICLE 7 OF TITLE 2. THE CENTER SHALL  
3 SUBMIT A COPY OF THE PROGRESS REPORT TO THE WATER RESOURCES AND  
4 AGRICULTURE REVIEW COMMITTEE AND, UPON REQUEST OF THE  
5 COMMITTEE, PRESENT THE PROGRESS REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE.

6 (b) ON OR BEFORE JANUARY 1, 2026, PREPARE A FINAL REPORT OF  
7 THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STUDY AND POST THE FINAL  
8 REPORT ON THE CENTER'S WEBSITE; AND

9 (c) DURING THE 2026 CALENDAR YEAR, PRESENT THE FINAL  
10 REPORT:

11 (I) TO THE WATER RESOURCES AND AGRICULTURE REVIEW  
12 COMMITTEE; AND

13 (II) TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE AGRICULTURAL  
14 COMMITTEES.

15 (5) THIS SECTION IS REPEALED, EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2027.

16 **SECTION 2. Safety clause.** The general assembly hereby finds,  
17 determines, and declares that this act is necessary for the immediate  
18 preservation of the public peace, health, or safety.