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NEWS RELEASE

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Gov. Cox, state leaders and the Colorado River Authority of Utah applaud Washington County's aggressive conservation plan to meet growing water demand

SALT LAKE CITY (Oct. 20, 2022) – After meeting with representatives of the Washington County Water Conservancy District, Gov. Spencer Cox commended the district for its move toward long-term conservation measures in the face of mounting growth and severe drought.

Gov. Spencer Cox, Department of Natural Resources Executive Director Joel Ferry and Colorado River Authority Executive Director Amy Haas discussed water supply and growing demand in the county during a meeting earlier this month in St. George.

“Responsible, sustainable growth will only occur if Utahns work together to conserve water,” said Gov. Cox. “We need to be smarter stewards of this precious resource, and this begins with conservation.”

Like the entire Colorado River basin, Washington County faces a declining water supply and ongoing water shortages. The state of Utah and Washington County are moving aggressively to conserve and develop all local water resources through:

- **Conservation** – including prohibiting non-functional grass in new commercial, institutional and industrial projects and implementing grass-removal rebates and water-wise landscaping ordinances
- **Reuse** – developing a large-scale regional water reuse and recycling program
- **Desalting** – desalinating hot springs to potable standards
- **Storage** – creating new storage space to capture and store water for dry periods
- **Agricultural optimization** – implementing new technology to improve water efficiency

“Through the implementation of these measures, Washington County has signaled its commitment to be on the forefront of meaningful water conservation in the West,” said Gov. Cox.

The mega-drought currently plaguing the West has highlighted the need to become more drought resilient and stretch the water supply.

“In light of the current conditions on the Colorado River, our focus is on increased conservation and developing our local supply,” said Zachary Renstrom, general manager of the Washington County Water Conservancy District. “While the Lake Powell Pipeline is a component of our long-term water resources plan, we recognize that its timing and scope may have to change.”

“We look forward to continuing to work with the district to ensure planning is consistent with future hydrology on the Colorado River and agreements with the Basin states,” said Gene Shawcroft, Utah’s Colorado River Commissioner.

Washington County is one of the nation’s fastest-growing regions. Current state projections estimate the county’s population will increase up to 200% by 2060. In addition to residents, Washington County attracts more than 6 million annual visitors and thousands of seasonal residents. The high visitor volume and seasonal population add significantly to Washington County’s water demand.

The county’s major population centers depend exclusively on the Virgin River, a tributary to the Colorado River, for water. The Virgin River is a small, drought-prone tributary that has been fully developed. The county is currently using more than 90% of its annual reliable water supply. Additional conservation measures and development of local water alternatives are essential to protect the county’s existing and projected economy and population.

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