

Lawsuit challenges Utah plan to get water from Flaming Gorge

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The Flaming Gorge Basin, Utah/Wyoming, date unspecified | Photo by [Nick Gorski](#) from [Pixabay](#), St. George News

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Conservation groups sued the U.S. government Thursday over a new agreement that will allow Utah to take water from the Flaming Gorge Dam.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation didn't properly assess the effects on water levels, endangered fishes and recreation on the Green River in approving an agreement signed Wednesday between the federal agency and state of Utah, the Center for Biological Diversity and three other organizations say in the lawsuit.

The plan allows Utah to get up to 72,600 acre-feet of water annually for 50 years from the Flaming Gorge Dam near the Utah-Wyoming border in

exchange for giving up water rights from the Green River and its tributaries.

John Weisheit, of the Living Rivers and Colorado Riverkeeper organizations that are among the groups suing, said the Bureau of Reclamation ignored studies that indicate there won't be enough water in that time period for all the states and entities that need water from the ecosystem.

The Bureau of Reclamation's assessment of the project that determined it would have no significant environmental impact didn't take into account drought, climate change or other potential water proposals in the West such as the Lake Powell pipeline that could deplete the Green and Colorado rivers, he said.

"There is a huge disconnect between science and policy," Weisheit said. "That's not wet water, that's paper water. This is just irresponsible."

Bureau of Reclamation spokesman Marlon Duke declined comment on the lawsuit, saying the agency can't respond until it is formally served with the lawsuit.

The agency said in a news release Wednesday about the agreement that it represented a productive partnership and maximized value from the available water resources.

Utah state officials didn't immediately have comment Thursday on the lawsuit.

Eric Millis, director of the Utah Division of Water Resources, said in the Wednesday news release the plan gives the state a reliable water source while benefiting the Green and Colorado rivers.

Utah was one of seven states that this week that, after years of negotiations, reached agreement on a plan to protect the Colorado River amid a prolonged drought.

Written by BRADY McCOMBS Associated Press.

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