



Analysis and Policy Review of the Colorado Water Plan

The Colorado Water Plan is the beginning of a long-term effort to meet future water needs and demands. As a major player in water use, the green industry faces both significant opportunities and challenges. How we meet those issues will influence the future success and growth of the green industry. This is why the industry needs to understand the Plan and how it will impact our industry going forward.

This backgrounder serves as a summary and analysis of the final Colorado Water Plan, presented to the Governor in late November 2015. A statewide plan for water use in our state is imperative. At the same time, it is critical for the future success of the green industry that GreenCO and its member associations use the Colorado Water Plan to develop policy and industry goals.

GreenCO commissioned a quantification study of our Best Management Practices (BMPs) in 2015. This study was critical because it gave us reliable data that shows following industry BMPs saves water. Numbers are presented as percentages or calculated in acre feet. Please refer to that study and to our comments on the second draft of the water plan for further information on the documented savings that implementing BMPs can provide in the urban landscape.

The most important point from the Colorado Water Plan is that as an industry, we must shift our focus from a state-only level and also engage on water policy at the local level, as there will be a greater need to educate and lobby the local governments, water providers and users about outdoor water use.

Colorado Water Plan

The Colorado Water Plan is an effort years in the making with a very simple focus: how does Colorado meet its water needs for the future? The plan was developed through many meetings and discussions with water providers, the agriculture community, cities, river basin users and managers, water providers, policy makers and several business and industry groups. There are 11 chapters in four basic categories:

- *Chapter 1: Background*
- *Chapters 2-5: Colorado Water Management*
- *Chapters 6-9: Plan Strategy*
- *Chapters 10-11: Details on Strategy and Recommendations*

This brief focuses on the high-level policy issues and expected outcomes that we believe will impact the green industry.

Plan Metrics:

Measurable goals of interest to our industry:

- Colorado Supply/Demand Gap: Plan calls out a 2050 gap of 560,000 acre feet of water needed to meet demand.
- Conservation: Achieve a 400,000 acre feet of water conservation from municipal and industrial water users by 2050. (Our industry most often uses municipal and industrial water.)

- Land Use: By 2025, water and water use will be incorporated into land planning in 75% of Colorado communities.
- Agricultural Use: With agriculture land being consolidated and agriculture acres being diminished, water conservation and efficiency measures must be implemented in order for agriculture to still meet population growth needs.
- Storage: Develop 400,000 acre feet of water storage by 2050.
- Watershed and Environmental Concerns: Since 80% of the state population relying on watersheds, the Plan will address issues related to river health, streams and watersheds by 2030.
- Funding: Find revenues to produce \$1M a year in funding by 2020 and \$1B by 2050.
- Education: Educate public and water stakeholders on plan objectives by 2030.

GreenCO Areas of Concern/Opportunity:

Chapter 5: Water Demands

- Colorado currently consumes 5.3 million acre feet of water per year.
- 89% of that water is agricultural water; 11% is municipal and industrial.
- The Colorado population is expected to grow from 5.3 million today to over 9.0 million by 2050.
- Municipal diversions account for about 970,000 acre feet per year. Indoor use is 53% of that number and outdoor use represents 39%.

We are focused on several recommendations in chapter 5, table 5-1. The target ranges depending on low-, medium-, or high-strategy conservation.

1. Landscape water use reductions: 15% to 35%
2. Audits of high-demand landscape users: Target up to 80% of those users for audits
3. Landscape turf reductions: 20% - 50% turf restrictions in landscapes.
4. Irrigation Efficiency: Improve <10% to 100% of landscapes.

Other Municipal Issues of Concern:

- Reuse: Depending on water source and policy changes, there are a number of possible negative impacts on landscape water use.
- Land use: There needs to be a definition of *efficient* for discussions involving efficiency of water systems. This was a major point we made in our comments to the state, and we will keep this discussion alive with local policy makers as well. There is also need for discussion around of “limiting lawn size.” Implementing our BMPs for landscape irrigation can support landscape efficiency.

State Planning Issues:

1. Conservation
2. Water reuse
3. Completion of water storage projects
4. Development of alternative agricultural transfers of water
5. Use of future trans-mountain diversions

Water gaps in the plan are identified by river basin. Focus on all river basins is important, but a complete review of South Platte/Metro is a must. Local governments and basins will decide much of the plan for their cities and river basin.

Conservation/Reuse:

Key points in Chapter 6:

- Improve water law to promote reuse and conservation.
- Educate local agencies about conservation that is based on sound science rather than arbitrary restrictions and watering bans.
- Promote funding for incentives and tax credits for conservation and reuse.
- Promote BMPs as standards for local use—not just guidelines.
- ● Certain water basins are calling for 17-33% reduction in outdoor water use. The industry will make sure to use existing success stories on how to reduce outdoor use via implementation of BMPs (case studies, Town of Castle Rock's BMP requirement, etc).

Land Use:

Water planning and land-use planning are often not connected in a manner that produces the needed outcomes. Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) supports a plan for the Denver Metro area that can be a blueprint for use elsewhere. DRCOG wants to:

1. Have extensive collaboration with stakeholders.
2. Use best practices and establish them as a standard.
3. Promote efficient landscape development. (Again, 'efficient' will need to be defined and we plan to play a key role in that definition.)
4. Develop local land-use tools: BMPs, conservation and reuse programs.

Reuse:

Reuse strategies in Colorado need to be further developed and clarified. Reuse offers both a new water source and conservation strategy that can work in certain conditions. Colorado needs to clarify regulatory compliance issues for reuse. There needs to be a drive to fund incentives for innovation and implementation of sound reuse plans.

Agriculture and water project issues are also in chapter 6. To meet 2050 water goals, Colorado needs agricultural conservation and innovation with a high percentage of project completion.

Critical Goals of the Plan:

Legislation:

Developing and implementing the water plan requires legislation. This includes:

- Conservation measures for both indoor and outdoor applications. This would include a model ordinance requiring local use of BMPs (a 2016 GreenCO project). It may also include engaging on turf restrictions or other types of bans. Local interaction and education must be a major focus for the industry in the future, and we'll need members all over the state to become involved.
- Funding measures will be a priority as plan objectives become clearer and projects are better defined throughout the state. Incentives and tax credits could be major players for both local governments and private users.
- Education will be an ongoing issue. Funding other engagement efforts will be needed at many different levels. The Plan will dictate how/when education will occur as plan objectives are finalized. This will be another area of effort for GreenCO for years to come—get our story out there and keep it current.