

Urban Landscape Conservation Task Force

In January 2023, Governor Polis directed the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to convene the Urban Landscape Conservation Task Force (task force) in conjunction with the release of the 2023 Colorado Water Plan (Water Plan) and the launch of the state's Turf Replacement Program. The task force was charged with exploring practical tools to create a paradigm shift around how the state's urban landscapes look and function, as referenced in Agency Action 1.7 of the Water Plan. Even as the CWCB led the task force process and meetings and recognizes the importance of these discussions, the views and final recommendations in the report are those of the task force and should not be construed to represent the state's position (see full report disclaimer).

Task Force Recommendations

After eight meetings, the task force reached a consensus on the following recommendations. These recommendations are supported by **Areas to Research and Analyze** as well as **Complementary Efforts to Watch**, detailed on the following page. These recommendations provide solid direction for decision-makers or anyone curious about how to advance transformative landscape change in Colorado.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADVANCE

- **ADOPT TURF POLICY** - Support legislation prohibiting installations of nonfunctional water-intensive turf as defined by the task force in new and redevelopment.
- **SUPPORT TURF REPLACEMENT IN EXISTING DEVELOPMENT** - Continue state support and funding for voluntary turf removal replacement programs and projects, and support local implementation of turf policy and incentive programs.
- **PROMOTE IRRIGATION EFFICIENCY** - Require efficient irrigation design and equipment in new construction and promote efficient irrigation equipment, management practices, and maintenance across all landscapes, new and existing.
- **ADVANCE WATER AND LAND USE INTEGRATION** - Support integration of water supply and demand planning, land use and comprehensive planning, and implementation tools to further water efficiency efforts and support climate-appropriate landscapes.
- **IDENTIFY TARGETS** - Develop a Colorado-wide methodology for calculating outdoor water use targets that can be used at the local level to define water-wise landscapes and wasteful irrigation levels.
- **PARTNER WITH INDUSTRIES** - Collaborate with landscape professionals and businesses to advance landscape transformation solutions and build capacity.
- **USE PRICE SIGNALS** - Encourage pricing mechanisms such as conservation-oriented tap fees and water rates, water dedication policies, and water budgets to encourage and maintain affordability for efficient use and discourage inefficient outdoor water use.
- **ADDRESS EQUITY CONCERNS** - Incorporate equity into the development of outdoor water conservation policies, regulations, rate structures, fees, and programs to ensure water affordability for essential use and increase access to landscape benefits community-wide.
- **CREATE A MESSAGING CAMPAIGN** - Create educational resources and marketing campaigns with standardized messaging around the components and definitions of ColoradoScape, functional turf, nonfunctional turf, and climate-adapted vegetation to promote successful landscape transformation and ecosystem function.
- **SUPPORT STATEWIDE COLLABORATION** - Promote ongoing investments in water conservation that advance creative solutions and partnerships to address statewide water challenges alongside work to maximize municipal water portfolios and operational flexibility.

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The task force identified several topics where additional research and analysis could help support the task force recommendations. The following topics are in no particular order and could be eligible candidates for grant funding through CWCB's Water Plan Grant Program or other funding opportunities.

AREAS TO RESEARCH AND ANALYZE

- **COLORADO TURF TOTALS** - Evaluate Geographic Information System (GIS) data across Colorado (locally and statewide) to determine the total amount of irrigable turf. Where feasible, analysis could apply nonfunctional turf definitions to mapping to better understand the potential for removal, water savings, and policy advancement.
- **WATER SAVINGS** - Study the potential and actual long-term and sustained water savings from turf removal and how human behavior impacts estimated savings.
- **TURF REMOVAL AND REPLACEMENT GUIDES** - Develop a step-by-step guide to implement best practices for turf installation and removal that can be tailored to all sectors and varying property sizes to improve knowledge accessibility. Separate guides could be available for residential do-it-yourself (DIY) efforts and water providers for a multi-pronged informational approach.
- **TURF REMOVAL IMPACTS** - Research the known and unknown effects of accelerated and widespread turf removal on ecosystems, water quality, affordable housing, and existing inequities.
- **UNDERSTANDING LAND USE CODES** - Compile best practices and case studies of various municipal landscape codes and model codes from across Colorado that highlight how to reduce nonfunctional turf installation and eliminate antiquated policies such as minimum turf requirements in ways that help reduce barriers for local governments to help accelerate adoption.
- **APPROPRIATE VEGETATION** - Develop regional plant and grass lists with low-water-use vegetation options for turf replacement.
- **NEW DEVELOPMENT COST ANALYSIS** - Study the impacts on affordable housing resulting from potential cost shifts from new landscape standards in new construction and ways to mitigate any potential cost increases for new developments. Conduct a statewide demand analysis to understand the impact of tap fee and rate changes on individual systems and housing costs.
- **IMPACTS OF WATER CONSERVATION TOOLS** - Analyze the effectiveness of different conservation tools and programs across customer classes and how they impact water use behavior to help improve understanding of the best practices to reduce outdoor water use. Learn from previous studies (i.e., [The Alliance For Water Efficiency's 2019 Landscape Transformation Study](#)) to evaluate different outdoor conservation efforts, compare and rank implementation difficulty, estimated costs, and potential water savings to help those implementing turf programs understand better where it is easier/harder to start.
- **WATER BUDGET ADVANCEMENT** - Identify if a standardized water budget calculation or tool could be developed for water providers and users.
- **EQUITABLY DISTRIBUTED LANDSCAPES** - Realize opportunities where landscape restoration aligns with water-wise irrigation levels, enhanced community aesthetics, increased gathering and play areas, and the mitigation of heat island impacts.
- **LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT** - Find ways to include all industry professionals equitably and create pathways for increased education and training by evaluating certification opportunities for landscape professionals with a focus on efficient water management.

Complementary Efforts to Watch

- Colorado Springs Utilities Native Grass Guide for Installation and Maintenance
- Colorado Water Wise Municipal Best Practices Guide
- Colorado Water Conservation Board Colorado Water Plan Actions
- Department of Local Affairs Template Land Development Code
- New funding sources for the state's Turf Replacement Program
- Western Resource Advocates' Water Wise Landscapes: A Cost-Effective HOA Investment in Resilience

