



Colorado Water Conservation Board

Water Plan

Water Project Summary

Name of Applicant	Blue Elements	
Name of Water Project	Watershed Stewards AmeriCorps Program	
Grant Request Amount		\$84,226.00
Primary Category		\$84,226.00
<i>Engagement & Innovation Activities</i>		
Total Applicant Match		\$0.00
<i>Applicant Cash Match</i>		
<i>Applicant In-Kind Match</i>		\$0.00
Total Other Sources of Funding		\$304,295.00
<i>ServeCO</i>		\$130,900.00
<i>GOCO</i>		\$74,203.00
<i>Colorado Dept of Public Health and Environment</i>		\$99,192.00
Total Project Cost		\$388,521.00

Applicant & Grantee Information

Name of Grantee: Blue Elements	
Mailing Address: 9996 W. US HWY 50 #1009 Salida CO 81201	
Organization Contact: Sheena O'Hara	
Position/Title: Program Director	Email: sheena@blueelements.org
Phone: 970-485-3746	
Organization Contact - Alternate: Emily Loubsky	
Position/Title:	Email: emily@blueelements.org
Phone: 719-214-0574	
Grant Management Contact: Sheena O'Hara	
Position/Title: Program Director	Email: sheena@blueelements.org
Phone: 970-485-3746	
Grant Management Contact - Alternate: Emily Loubsky	
Position/Title:	Email: emily@blueelements.org
Phone: 719-214-0574	

Description of Grantee/Applicant

Watershed Stewardship 501(c)3

Type of Eligible Entity

☐ Public (Government)

- ☐ Public (District)
- ☐ Public (Municipality)
- ☐ Ditch Company
- ☐ Private Incorporated
- ☐ Private Individual, Partnership, or Sole Proprietor
- ☒ Non-governmental Organization
- ☐ Covered Entity
- ☐ Other

Category of Water Project

- ☐ Agricultural Projects
Developing communications materials that specifically work with and educate the agricultural community on headwater restoration, identifying the state of the science of this type of work to assist agricultural users among others.
- ☐ Conservation & Land Use Planning
Activities and projects that implement long-term strategies for conservation, land use, and drought planning.
- ☒ Engagement & Innovation Activities
Activities and projects that support water education, outreach, and innovation efforts. Please fill out the Supplemental Application on the website.
- ☐ Watershed Restoration & Recreation
Projects that promote watershed health, environmental health, and recreation.
- ☐ Water Storage & Supply
Projects that facilitate the development of additional storage, artificial aquifer recharge, and dredging existing reservoirs to restore the reservoirs' full decreed capacity and Multi-beneficial projects and those projects identified in basin implementation plans to address the water supply and demand gap.

Location of Water Project

Latitude 39.250720
 Longitude -106.292160
 Lat Long Flag Municipal centroid: Coordinates based on centroid of municipal boundary
 Water Source
 Basins Arkansas
 Counties Chaffee; Lake; Fremont
 Districts 11-Arkansas: Headwaters to Salida; 12-Arkansas: Salida to Portland

Water Project Overview

Major Water Use Type
 Type of Water Project Capacity Building
 Scheduled Start Date - Design 1/1/2025
 Scheduled Start Date - Construction
 Description
 The Watershed Stewards AmeriCorps Program is designed to foster a skilled and diverse incoming water workforce through professional pathway internship opportunities. These AmeriCorps members serve with capacity limited water-focused organizations. The Watershed Stewards Program has three elements:

1. Watershed Education Team
2. Watershed Stewardship Team

3. Water Quality Monitoring Team

Blue Elements has secured funding from Serve Colorado/AmeriCorps for the Watershed Stewards Program through 2026. This funds the AmeriCorps members' living allowance (pay) at a meager amount of \$1454 per month. At this rate it is difficult to attract and retain qualified individuals for these service opportunities, as the cost of living in the Arkansas Valley is prohibitively high. Funding from the Colorado Water Plan Grant is urgently needed to supplement that funding and will directly provide each member a housing allowance of \$600 per month. This funding will support the recruitment, training, and retention (via housing allowances) of incoming water professionals. The opportunity for continued support from the Water Plan Grant beyond 2025 would enable continued retention of a skilled incoming water workforce through our current grant cycle ending December 2026.

Measurable Results

New Storage Created (acre-feet)
New Annual Water Supplies Developed or Conserved (acre-feet), Consumptive or Nonconsumptive
Existing Storage Preserved or Enhanced (acre-feet)
New Storage Created (acre-feet)
Length of Stream Restored or Protected (linear feet)
Length of Pipe, Canal Built or Improved (linear feet)
Efficiency Savings (dollars/year)
Efficiency Savings (acre-feet/year)
Area of Restored or Preserved Habitat (acres)
Quantity of Water Shared through Alternative Transfer Mechanisms or water sharing agreement (acre-feet)
Number of Coloradans Impacted by Incorporating Water-Saving Actions into Land Use Planning
Number of Coloradans Impacted by Engagement Activity

Other

No additional measurable results provided

Water Project Justification

The Watershed Stewards Program directly addresses key elements outlined in the Colorado Water Plan, the Arkansas Basin Implementation Plan, and the Statewide Water Education Action Plan (SWEAP).

Aligning with the water values guiding the Colorado Water Plan, the Watershed Stewards Program supports vibrant communities and recreation and tourism initiatives. Through educational outreach, youth and community engagement, the program directly encourages an informed public. By engaging with schools which serve diverse populations, the Watershed Stewards Program acknowledges the needs for embracing equity, diversity and inclusivity in education and engagement projects. The program empowers residents to participate in community stewardship events and engage with local watershed groups, thereby fostering collaboration across sectors and communities. Through water quality monitoring, the program provides informed guidance for efficient and effective water infrastructure systems, involves local residents in citizen science opportunities, and supports healthy watersheds, rivers, streams, and wildlife.

The Watershed Stewards Program supports goals outlined in the Arkansas Basin Implementation Plan, including 1. environment and recreation objectives around maintaining or improving habitat (including wetlands), 2. watershed health goals around water quality, and 3. supports the roundtable's Public Education, Participation, and Outreach (PEPO) mission.

Directly aligning with the Arkansas Basin Roundtable PEPO goal to "inform, engage and educate citizens of the

Arkansas River Basin about local water resources,” the Watershed Stewards Program will engage youth and community in discourse guided by the critical water concepts outlined by SWEAP. Water education will build on strategies to achieve the Water Education Continuum outcomes of awareness, knowledge and skills, behavior change and systems change.

Related Studies

Critical findings from the American Water Works Association's (AWWA) State of the Water Industry '22 identify key workforce challenges within the water sector, ranking the aging water workforce as the fourth most critical issue and talent attraction and retention as the eleventh. These findings underscore the urgent need to address workforce gaps and develop strategies for attracting and retaining talent in the water industry. The research indicates that issues such as staffing shortages, a lack of qualified candidates, limited educational opportunities, low pay, the need to advance diversity, and the challenge of attracting young professionals are prevalent concerns among industry participants (AWWA 2022, State of the Water Industry '22).

A primary objective of the Watershed Stewards Program is to eliminate the “barriers to entry” faced by underrepresented individuals when seeking professional opportunities in the water sector. The Watershed Stewards Program works to increase inclusivity and equity within the water field. The program does this by creating professional career pathways in the water field for diverse and historically excluded individuals, and by creating opportunities for previously excluded communities to engage in discourse, decision-making, and stewardship of our water resources.

Taxpayer Bill of Rights

No Tax Bill of Rights provided