



## COLORADO

Colorado Water  
Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

Jared Polis, Governor

Dan Gibbs, DNR Executive Director

Lauren Ris, CWCB Director

TO: Colorado Water Conservation Board Members

FROM: Elizabeth Schoder, Water Supply Planning

DATE: May 21, 2025 CWCB Board Meeting

ITEM: Agenda Item #8 Water Education Colorado (WEco) Annual Allocation

---

**Staff recommendation:** Staff recommends the Board approve the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Scope of Work for Water Education Colorado (WEco).

### Background

The CWCB has supported WEco since its inception in 2002. This support has included serving on the WEco board, providing guidance, partnering on numerous outreach and educational efforts, and financial support from the CWCB Construction Fund as well as from other various CWCB grant programs and funding sources.

From Fiscal Year 2002 to Fiscal Year 2020 the CWCB supported WEco (formerly known as Colorado Foundation for Water Education) with an annual \$150,000 grant from the Construction Fund through a legislative mechanism known as a “continuous appropriation.” During the 2020 legislative session this appropriation was removed indefinitely through the 2020 CWCB Projects Bill (HB 20-1403), but was reinstated during the 2021 legislative session as an amendment to the 2021 Projects Bill (SB 21189). The Board approved the Fiscal Year 2025 WEco Scope of Work in May 2024.

As such, the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 WEco Scope of Work (Scope) is presented for Board review and approval. As in past years, the proposed Scope supports WEco’s annual operations, water education, and outreach programs. The Scope covers numerous efforts that align with both organizations’ missions in the form of four overarching tasks: Operational Support, Public Outreach, Water Education & Leadership Programs, and Content Programs. The subtasks within each section allow the CWCB and WEco to strategically prioritize work related to various aspects of the Colorado Water Plan. Juan Pérez Sáez joined WEco’s staff as the new Executive Director in September 2024, with Jayla Poppleton officially stepping down in that capacity in October 2024.

Elizabeth Schoder and Katie Weeman currently serve as the CWCB representatives on WEco’s Board, along with Nate Pearson serving as the DNR representative. Juan Pérez Sáez, WEco’s new Executive Director, will be present at the meeting to present on the proposed scope and answer questions. The proposed scope and summary table are attached.



## Proposed FY2026 WEco-CWCB Scope of Work

This Scope of Work identifies how the state legislative annual allocation via the CWCB Construction Fund, in the sum of \$150,000, will be used to support Water Education Colorado (WEco) operations and programs in the Fiscal Year 2026 (July 1, 2025- June 30, 2026).

### Operational Support

#### 1.1 Strategic Plan Implementation and Co-Creation of New Strategic Plan

##### *Overview*

In January 2020, the WEco Board of Trustees adopted a strategic plan to guide our work from 2020 to 2025. The plan identifies both internal-facing and external-facing goals for long-term sustainability and expanded impact. The plan, importantly, includes a strong emphasis on achieving equity in educational programs and improved access and reach to underrepresented audiences, whether geographic, ethnic, or socioeconomic. WEco continued to implement the goals of the 2020 - 2025 strategic plan and is currently in the process of creating our new 2026-2031 strategic plan. We have already created an Ad-Hoc committee made of members of our board and team, and have identified and hired a facilitator who will be leading the process for completing the new strategic plan before the end of 2025. We anticipate having a draft of this new plan at our fall board meeting and having an adopted final version of the plan before the end of 2025.

This will ensure that WEco action is aligned with our mission, vision, and values to ensure that Coloradans are educated on thoughtful stewardship of Colorado water.

The plan laid out for the upcoming strategic planning process is:

- Work alongside team and board members through the Ad-hoc Committee, and under the facilitation of an external consultant - in progress.
- Identify key stakeholders and initiate the board of trustees engagement.
- Continue to gather input from key stakeholders across the state - in progress.
- Identifying organizational priorities or pillars.
- Engage people across the state to ensure the plan aligns with the diverse geographic needs of our community.
- Revision and adoption of the 2026 - 2031 strategic plan in coordination with our board of trustees before the end of 2025.

In order to continue to activate the plan in its final stages to accomplish its goals, WEco will continue the strategic planning creation process. The new Strategic plan will start to

be implemented in January 2026. This document will be used to guide and measure our progress during the coming years.

#### *Work Plan*

- Continue working with WEco Board and Committees to co-create the new strategic plan in partnership with key stakeholders and under the facilitation of an external consultant.
- Present the Draft to the Board of Directors during the Fall Board meeting.
- Adoption of the new strategic plan before the end of the 2025 calendar year.
- Team retreat to familiarize themselves with the organization's priorities, and co-create the tracking system so we stay on track.
- Creation of individual annual work plans in alignment with strategic priorities.
- Promotion and distribution of the Strategic Plan among partners and key stakeholders across the state.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress. Strategic plan progress will be part of our Board of Trustees Meetings.

#### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$25,000	\$8,000

## 1.2 Financial Management and Reporting

#### *Overview*

Every year WEco completes a financial review. In the past, we had completed a financial audit every three years. As an organization with a budget of 1 million dollars or above, it is customary to do an annual audit every year. This audit will continue to show how the organization follows best accounting practices, and will enable us to access other sources of funding through foundations and grants. In addition, WEco produces an annual report to provide transparency in financial information, acknowledge donors, and share our impact. This helps us stay connected to our supporters and convey the value of our work, as well as to build additional capacity through fostering ongoing membership and donation support.

#### *Work Plan*

- Engage and work with the accounting firm to perform the FY25 financial audit.
- Complete and distribute FY25 year-end annual report.

#### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation

June 2026	\$17,500	\$7,000
-----------	----------	---------

### 1.3 Maintain and Update Web Platform

#### *Overview*

WEco developed and launched a new website in 2017 to vastly improve our digital presence and availability of our digital resources. The site continues to serve as a hub for all things WEco, including archives of all past publications, radio programs, webinars, and more. The site requires regular maintenance to maintain functionality, improve Search Engine Optimization so that interested learners can readily find our information, and improve the user experience.

#### *Work Plan*

- Engage and renew the web developer contract for annual maintenance.
- Review Google Analytics to understand how viewers are interacting with the site and evaluate opportunities for improvement.
- Continue prioritization and implementation of improvements.

#### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$30,000	\$10,000

## General Public Outreach

### 2.1 General Public Outreach

#### *Overview*

Colorado continues to welcome thousands of new residents every month who are unfamiliar with the water resource constraints and concerns in our state. WEco has also consistently heard from members and the wider water community that more general public education and outreach are needed to raise awareness, promote sustainable water behaviors, and inform decision-making. Additionally, WEco staff members are regularly asked to give presentations to community groups and conferences, recommend resources, and promote resources and opportunities through the Headwaters PULSE newsletter, the WEco website, and social media.

In addition, WEco conducts various outreach activities to legislators throughout the legislative session, as well as to county commissioners. In 2025, WEco held three 201-level water workshops at the Capitol, distributed publications to legislators, and delivered a welcome letter highlighting other opportunities to learn about water. In

FY25, WEco also held one and is currently planning the second training for county commissioners, and will also provide free educational material to local leaders. In 2026, WEco will continue to pursue similar opportunities.

#### *Work Plan*

- Provide presentations as requested and as the team capacity allows for community groups.
- Present at conferences to promote educational opportunities and resources
- Identify relevant resources for community groups as requested.
- Promote educational opportunities and resources through our newsletter and WEco's events calendar.
- Offer educational opportunities to legislators.
- Offer educational opportunities to county commissioners.

#### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$48,250	\$20,000

## 2.2 Participation in Collaborative Groups

#### *Overview*

WEco staff are regularly invited to participate in and advise on educational opportunities and resources through various collaborative forums and other community and educational groups.

#### *Work Plan*

- Participate and support collaborative forums including the Basin Roundtables, the Public Education, Participation and Outreach work group, the Water and Land Use Alliance, the Colorado Water Congress Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee, advise on Water in the West with CSU Spur, and respond to other miscellaneous opportunities and requests from organizations for support on outreach activities.

#### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$25,000	\$8,000

## Water Education & Leadership Programs

### 3.1 Water Fluency Program

#### *Overview*

In its eleventh year, WEco's Water Fluency Program offers elected officials, appointed water board members, students, and members of the public immersion in the language and concepts of water as well as tools for navigating the culture, complexity, and future of water management and policy issues. Topics covered include an orientation to basic hydrology, water law and administration, interstate issues, water quality protection, funding opportunities for projects (including CWCB grants and loan programs), the Basin Roundtables and Colorado Water Plan, land use and water efficiency, watershed health and protection, stream management planning, and more.

This in-depth curriculum consistently receives strong positive feedback and has filled or exceeded the 35-class-member capacity every year. WEco is offering the 2025 program featuring case studies from the North Platte River Basin. The second half of the program will be completed in FY26. WEco will also prepare to hold the 2025 program with a focus, tentatively on the Southwest River Basin.

Additionally, because of the program's popularity and effectiveness, WEco is currently working to develop an online Water Fluency adjacent program named Water Fluency Online. This will eventually become a series of one to two-month modules that focus on one specific aspect of Colorado water. The first module, currently under development, will focus on water law, providing an opportunity for Water Fluency graduates, or other people interested in increasing their knowledge, to spend dedicated time learning from water lawyers across the state.

#### *Work Plan*

- Hold the second half of the 2025 program between July and September.
- Collect and analyze feedback, and adjust the curriculum based upon that feedback.
- Plan, market, and open registration for the 2026 program.
- Develop and open registration for a self-guided digital option.

#### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$65,600	\$12,000

### 3.2 Water Leaders Program

#### *Overview*

The Water Leaders Program is a highly regarded professional development program for water professionals who have demonstrated a sincere commitment to Colorado water as well as strong leadership potential. The curriculum instills leadership and

management principles in a select group of water professionals each year and grows their peer network so that they can be more effective in charting a path toward innovative and collaborative water solutions. Since 2006, more than 262 graduates have completed the program, including several CWCB staff and current board members, as well as other prominent leaders in the Colorado water community. In FY23, WEco increased the class size for Water Leaders to 20 participants, up from 16, this enabled us to support more leaders in up-leveling their skills, and has maintained that size. This has been a positive change and has been maintained since then. CWCB's contribution through the Scope of Work keeps tuition for the Water Leaders Program affordable. Combined with other sponsorship support, CWCB funding keeps tuition 13% lower than it would otherwise be. In addition to the annual Water Leaders Program offering, WEco provides an annual Water Leaders 2.0 training opportunity for alumni to continue to improve their skills.

#### *Work Plan*

WEco will engage in the following:

- Complete the second half of the 2025 Water Leaders Program.
- Collect and analyze feedback; adjust the curriculum based upon that feedback.
- Market the 2026 program, select applicants, and run the first half of the Water Leaders Program-2026.
- Hold a 2.0 training opportunity for program alumni.

#### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$146,150	\$15,000

### 3.3 Annual River Basin Tour

#### *Overview*

WEco's annual river basin tours are an opportunity for decision makers, water professionals, and interested members of our community to see water management in action and to get an up-close look at the challenges and opportunities currently before the industry. Tours regularly hit capacity, and generally, one-half of tour attendees are individuals new to our organization.

#### *Work Plan*

- WEco will produce one multi-day Annual Basin tour, tentatively in the Upper South Platte River Basin. The South Platte Basin Roundtable will be invited to provide input in tour planning to focus a portion of the agenda on their Basin Implementation Plan. The CWCB will receive a seat on the tour free of charge.

### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$48,500	\$10,000

## Content Programs

### 4.1 Headwaters Fall 2025 issue: Fish

#### *Overview*

WEco has published Headwaters magazine since 2003 and now boasts more than 60 issues in its archives, all of which are available online. The magazine continues to tackle tough issues in an accessible, engaging way, highlighting diverse perspectives, case studies, and human interest stories from across Colorado and the West, and providing opportunities for engagement and further learning.

Coverage highlights recent innovations, collaborations, policy developments, and challenges/opportunities on the given topic to continue informing the statewide water community, decision makers, and broader community members from a non-advocacy perspective.

The first issue in FY26 will focus on fish and Colorado water resources, including endangered fish recovery programs, innovative projects to help fish in Colorado, the recreation industry, and more.

#### *Work Plan*

WEco will produce the following:

- Produce and distribute the Fall 2025 issue of *Headwaters* magazine on fish.
- CWCB will receive 15 copies of the *Headwaters* magazine free of charge and be invited to serve on the peer review working group.

### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
July-November 2025	\$48,175	\$15,000

### 4.2 Headwaters Spring 2026 issue: Topic TBD

#### *Overview*

The topic for the second issue in FY26 will be selected by WEco's Publications Committee.



### *Work Plan*

WEco will produce the following:

- Half-day gathering of experts to identify the issues, current research, challenges, and opportunities that WEco should focus on related to the topic
- Produce and distribute the Spring 2026 issue of *Headwaters* magazine.
- CWCB will receive 15 copies of the *Headwaters* magazine free of charge and be invited to serve on the peer review work group.

### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
August 2025-April 2026	\$48,175	\$15,000

## 4.3 Headwaters Summer 2026 issue: Topic TBD

### *Overview*

The topic for the third issue in FY26 will be selected by WEco's Publications Committee.

### *Work Plan*

WEco will produce the following:

- Hold a half-day gathering of experts to identify the issues, current research, challenges, and opportunities that WEco should focus on related to the topic.
- Produce and distribute the Summer 2026 issue of *Headwaters* magazine.
- CWCB will receive 15 copies of the *Headwaters* magazine free of charge and will be invited to serve on the peer review work group.

### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
November 2025-June 2026	\$48,175	\$15,000

## 4.4 Companion content

### *Overview*

Following the publication of each issue of *Headwaters* magazine, WEco will continue to produce companion content in other non-print channels, including webinars and the Your Water Colorado blog, to further expose audiences, deepen understanding, and facilitate dialogue around the issues covered in the magazine.

### *Work Plan*

- Publish a series of related blog articles authored by WEco staff and experts following each issue of Headwaters.
- Host one webinar following each issue of Headwaters, based on selected content.

### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$22,000	\$5,000

## 4.5 Citizen's Guide/Community Guide Update, Translation, and Distribution

### *Overview*

WEco has built its Community Guide series over time, and currently offers 10 reference guides, which serve as comprehensive primers on key aspects of water management, history, law, and quality. Many of these guides have been updated to new editions in recent years, and the Community Guide library is currently well stocked. Identifying new opportunities for distribution to reach new audiences is a high priority.

WEco has also identified a need to provide more educational resources in Spanish to increase access and equity in water education. Between FY25 and FY26, we published the Community Guide to Where Your Water Comes From and the Community Guide to Colorado Water Law in Spanish. We have also changed the names of the guides as they are updated or translated to Community Guides to be more inclusive.

In FY24, WEco updated the Community Guide to Colorado Water Conservation to a 3<sup>rd</sup> edition to reflect the latest advances and priorities for water conservation in the municipal, agricultural and industrial sectors. In FY25 we are working in translating the guide to Spanish, as the third guide in the library to be available in Spanish. We will also produce a complimentary fact sheet summarizing the guide, in both English and Spanish.

### *Work Plan*

- Continue to increase the distribution of the existing Community Guides library to reach new audiences.
- Continue working on new distribution channels for Spanish guides and monitor/evaluate demand for the product.
- Complete the Conservation guide update in Spanish.
- Produce a Conservation guide fact sheet in English and Spanish.

### *Schedule and Budget*

Timeframe	Total Budget	Scope Allocation
Throughout FY2026	\$43,425	\$10,000

# WEco Construction Fund Allocation FY2026 Scope of Work Summary Table

## Task #1: Operational Support

Subtask		Time of Deliverable	Description of Deliverable	Budget	Scope Allocation
1.1	Strategic Plan Implementation and Co-Creation of New Strategic Plan	June 2026	Implement FY25 work plan and develop the 2026 - 2031 new strategic plan for WEco	\$25,000	\$8,000
1.2	Financial Management and Reporting	June 2026	Complete FY2025 financial audit and annual report to share with members and supporters	\$17,500	\$7,000
1.3	Maintain and update web platform	June 2026	Maintain website functionality and identify opportunities to improve user experience and viewer metrics	\$30,000	\$10,000
Task 1 Total				\$72,500	\$25,000

## Task #2: Public Outreach

Subtask		Time of Deliverable	Description of Deliverable	Budget	Scope Allocation
2.1	General Public Outreach	June 2026	Provide presentations to various community groups and conferences, promote educational opportunities and resources through newsletter and events calendar, offer educational opportunities to legislators and county commissioners	\$48,250	\$20,000
2.2	Participation in Collaborative groups	June 2026	Participate in collaborative groups (e.g. Basin Roundtables, Public Education, Participation and Outreach workgroup, Water and Land Use Alliance), support EDI work with Colorado Water Congress, advise on Water in the West with SPUR, and support organizations with requests for other miscellaneous opportunities	\$25,000	\$8,000
Task 2 Total				\$73,250	\$28,000

## Task #2: Water Education & Leadership Programs

Subtask		Time of Deliverable	Description of Deliverable	Budget	Scope Allocation
3.1	Water Fluency Program	June 2026	Deliver 2025 program and plan, market and open registration for 2026 program, develop and open registration for self-guided, digital option	\$65,600	\$12,000
3.2	Water Leaders Program	June 2026	Complete second half of 2025 program and first half of 2026 program with 20 participants; offer a 201-level "shore-up" for alumni	\$146,150	\$15,000
3.3	Annual River Basin Tour	June 2026	Host multi-day bus tour, tentatively focused on Upper South Platte River Basin	\$48,500	\$10,000
Task 3 Total				\$260,250	\$37,000

## Task #4: Content Programs

Subtask		Time of Deliverable	Description of Deliverable	Budget	Scope Allocation
4.1	Headwaters Fall '25 - Fish	November 2025	Publish and distribute fall issue	\$48,175	\$15,000
4.2	Headwaters Spring '25 - Topic TBD	April 2026	Publish and distribute spring issue	\$48,175	\$15,000
4.3	Headwaters Summer '25 - Topic TBD	June 2026	Publish and distribute summer issue	\$48,175	\$15,000
4.4	Complimentary content including webinars and blog posts tied to Headwaters topics	June 2026	Produce one webinar and 1-2 blog posts following publication of Summer '25, Fall '25, and Spring '26 issues of Headwaters, digging deeper into the same topic focus area	\$22,000	\$5,000
4.5	Citizen's Guides / Community Guides Series	June 2026	Complete the translation to Spanish language of the Community Guide to Colorado Water Conservation and related fact sheet in Eng./Sp., focus on distribution and evaluation of demand for the first three Community Guides	\$43,425	\$10,000
Task 4 Total				\$209,950	\$60,000

<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>\$615,950</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>
--------------	--	--	------------------	------------------