



**COLORADO**

**Colorado Water  
Conservation Board**

Department of Natural Resources

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**TO:** CWCB Board

**FROM:** Russ Sands, Section Chief - Water Supply Planning

**DATE:** July 21, 2020 CWCB Board Meeting

**ITEM:** Water Plan Status Update

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**This is an informational item with no Board action requested.**

**Staff will provide updates to the Colorado Water Conservation Board (the Board) on the status of the Colorado Water Plan (Water Plan) update on a regular basis over the next year as the update of the plan is drafted. This memo marks the kick-off of this drafting phase.**

### **Introduction**

Since the 2015 Water Plan was released the state has been moving forward on the three part cycle of updating the plan. This includes updating the technical data that supports the Water Plan, having each basin re-assess the strategies, priorities and projects in their basins, then bringing that information together in a comprehensive update to the Water Plan (an eight year cycle). Increasingly, this cycle is referred to as the “A,B,Cs of the Water Plan”.

The 2019 Analysis and Technical Update (Technical Update) is the underlying data framework that supports the Water Plan update. It is the newest iteration of a report previously known as the Statewide Water Supply Initiative (SWSI). The 2019 Technical Update used new data and state-of-the-art tools to evaluate key drivers of future conditions--factors that stand to significantly change future water needs. These drivers include water supply and demand, economic growth, climate change, social values, and agricultural, municipal & industrial sector water demands. This refined modeling revealed that the most impactful drivers on future conditions were population growth and climate change, which allowed the CWCB to identify potential strategies, like conservation, to mitigate the worst of those impacts.

Following the Technical Update, in early 2020 the eight river basins began their basin planning to identify projects and strategies for water planning at the local level. Because the CWCB does not build projects directly, working to identify and support local efforts is critical. The roundtables have just finished the draft updates of their Basin Implementation Plans (BIPs). This effort is central to meeting future water needs. The BIPs are now going through a series of internal and eventually public reviews and revisions that will conclude at the end of 2021. Information and projects identified in the BIPs will support the Water Plan update which will be released the following year.

### **Summary of Water Plan Update Progress**

To date CWCB staff (staff) have worked on a number of efforts that have worked to incrementally build a vision for the Water Plan update.

## **Prework**

Building on the release of the Analysis and Technical Update while the BIPs were well underway, staff began contemplating the Water Plan update starting around June of 2020 through a series of efforts that preceded and informed the official scoping phase of the Water Plan update.

## **Water Plan Listening Sessions**

CWCB hosted four online public listening sessions to share updates about the Colorado Water Plan, hear from water leaders across the state, and gather feedback about how the Water Plan should approach the critical issues around Agriculture, Municipal & Industrial water, Environmental & Recreational needs, and Forest Health & Watershed Health.

The format was a series of GoToMeeting webinars that included a CWCB summary of the current Water Plan update process, a panel discussion with community and industry leaders, and open discussion with attendees via chat. The session information is listed below for each with links to the recordings.

Session Themes (Recordings linked)	Date	Number of Attendees	Panelists
<a href="#">Municipal &amp; Industrial</a>	June 3, 2020	295	Barb Biggs John Currier Jarrod Biggs Scott Winter Jackie Brown
<a href="#">Forest Health &amp; Watershed Health</a>	June 4, 2020	300	Kevin Houck Angela Boag Heather Dutton Mike Preston
<a href="#">Agriculture</a>	June 10, 2020	362	John Stulp Paul Bruchez Greg Peterson Cindy Lair
<a href="#">Environment &amp; Recreation</a>	June 11, 2020	324	Aaron Citron Nicole Seltzer Abby Burk Linda Bassi Cary Denison

Public input was collected during the sessions via questions and comments submitted in the GoToWebinar chat function and through email. In total, 119 comments or questions were collected during the four sessions. Staff developed responses for all questions or comments that sought additional information. The comments and staff responses can be found on CWCB's website ([link](#)).

A "Water for Breakfast" video was also compiled with input from staff for the 2020 Summer Water Congress to share CWCB staff's evolving thoughts on the Water Plan. The link to the recording of this session is [here](#).

Staff continued to workshop the parameters of the update internally through regular meetings in preparation for the launch into a formal scoping phase in October of 2020.

## **Scoping Phase Overview**

The Water Plan's scoping phase took place from October 2020 to June of 2021. The intent of the scoping phase was to proactively gather input to get in front of the 30,000 comments that came in for the original Water Plan and to create a shared vision for what the stakeholders wanted to see in the update. It included internal visioning exercises with staff as well as a robust outreach component. Collectively these efforts reframed some areas in the Water Plan Update based on staff input and the

desire to approach the update in a way that was consistent with the Technical Update and BIP strategies.

### **Internal Visioning**

CWCB staff kicked off scoping in October with regular internal meetings dedicated to the Water Plan update. These meetings helped staff build a vision for the update, identify key priorities, and lay out the proposed structure of the plan. Concurrently, staff held informal meetings with stakeholders to gather feedback and input on topics of interest. In January, CWCB staff presented to our Board of Directors the [early vision](#) for the Water Plan. At that time, the board generally supported the vision, allowing staff and Director Mitchell to move forward with publicly sharing a vision for the Water Plan Update at the virtual Riverside Chat held on January 27, 2021. At the time of the Riverside Chat, a suite of [five information sheets](#) describing the plans for the Water Plan update were posted for comment on [engagecwcb.org](#) along with a survey asking for feedback. The ideas shared in January with the board have not changed and are still the proposed approach for the update today. They include the major elements listed below.

- **Action-focused:** The original Water Plan was organized around nine objectives with goals set for varying deadlines ranging out to 2050. This update will keep the same values of the original plan, but re-orient them into four action areas that roughly align with cities, farms, streams, and planning. Within these action areas, the plan will identify near-term steps (5-7 years) aimed at managing risks. These actions will collectively capture the spirit of the original Water Plan objectives, while offering clear, actionable steps to manage Colorado’s water wisely for the future.
- **Line of sight:** The original Water Plan offered critical actions and objectives along with the history and context necessary to set the stage for such an unprecedented planning effort. The vision for the update includes streamlining the report and making it easier to see the line of sight between our values, action areas, and in turn, the actions recommended to achieve our long term vision.
- **Increasingly Accessible:** While the original plan topped out at 540 pages, the update will include a two-volume format - one version concise and action-focused, and one version more explanatory of overarching concepts. Both Volume 1 and Volume 2 content will be available interactively online.
- **Cross-Cutting Themes:** The Water Plan will include cross-cutting themes that transcend different sectors like storage, alternative transfer methods, and land use planning, and which provide benefits to cities, farms, streams and people. Topics that emerge as cross-cutting themes include but are not limited to:
  - Funding
  - Storage
  - Supply
  - Efficiency
  - Equity
  - Climate Change
  - Recreation
  - Land Use Planning
  - Forest Health
  - Education

### **Scoping Phase Outreach**

From late January through July of 2021, CWCB staff organized an array of scoping outreach events covering a range of important topics for the Water Plan update. While not every topic had its own workshop, many important subjects were discussed in these conversations and staff also took feedback through calls, interviews, white papers, and other less formal means. Staff held nearly 30 hours of workshops, hosting 50+ speakers, and gathering input from stakeholders and the public through comments, white papers, and interviews. Over 900 participants joined these workshops. The sections below highlight the major scoping efforts.

### ***EngagecwcB Website***

The [engagecwcB.org](https://engagecwcB.org) website is a stakeholder engagement platform that CWCB utilizes to collect input and share information about the Water Plan and Basin Implementation plans as well as other ongoing issues in Colorado Water such as Demand Management. During scoping, 122 stakeholders registered to receive updates. During the scoping phase the site functioned as a place for stakeholders to review information and learn about events, see a timeline of upcoming work, review recordings of Water Plan [workshops](#), and share their feedback on both via a survey that was open from January 27, 2021 -June 30th, 2021. The survey collected 31 responses during that time on a range of topics.

### ***Riverside Chat I***

CWCB organized a virtual “[Riverside Chat](#)” event on January 27th, 2021 to share information about the vision for the Colorado Water Plan update. The event was a virtual 2-hour interview with Director Becky Mitchell, CWCB staff, and Water Plan update general contractor Matt Lindburg. The event shared the progress to date on the Colorado Water Plan update. Participants were directed to visit [engagecwcB.org](https://engagecwcB.org) to read information sheets, submit comments and take a survey on the information presented.

### ***Workshops and Meetings***

Since February of this year, CWCB staff have organized 13 scoping workshops (recordings and information available [here](#)) geared toward gathering targeted feedback on specific issues that will inform the Water Plan update. In addition to the formal workshops staff also conducted informal interviews and hosted regular meetings with key stakeholder groups including members of the Water Availability Task Force, and the Agricultural and Municipal Impact Task Forces, that served in part to inform the update. Staff also kicked off the first meeting with the 21-member Equity Task Force during this scoping phase and are working with them to learn about how the state’s water planning could be more inclusive.

### ***Riverside Chat II***

CWCB hosted a virtual “[Riverside Chat II](#)” event on June 8th, 2021 to share information about the major themes that emerged during the scoping phase for the Colorado Water Plan update. The event followed the same format as the first and shared the progress to date on the Colorado Water Plan update, reviewed the work completed during the scoping phase, and classified the major themes of input stakeholders have shared.

### **Scoping Phase Takeaways**

In addition to what was outlined in the [information sheets](#), staff heard several consistent themes which are summarized here.

### ***Thriving Watersheds Themes***

The action area of Thriving Watersheds includes environmental and recreational water uses as well as forest health. Two workshops on these topics were held that featured 23 speakers and engaged with over 200 stakeholders. The Environmental and Recreational workshop included an interactive element with breakout rooms for each basin and other stakeholders to review the attributes and elements in their [focus area maps](#). The focus area maps were new tools developed during scoping to help stakeholder visualize current priorities. Additionally, one-on-one interviews and email exchanges were held with stakeholders, and two whitepapers were submitted on behalf of coalitions of non-governmental organizations active in these areas. The Forest Health scoping work included a workshop, survey, and a literature review of papers assembled by staff and others. Within this action area, the major themes that arose during scoping were:

1. Stakeholders want environmental and recreational water needs to remain equally important to other sectors in the water plan and they hold a strong belief that environmental and recreational water needs touch all 4 action areas in the update.

2. More progress and a more efficient process is needed to prioritize stream reaches, collect stream health and recreation data, develop tools, improve restoration methodologies, and develop measurable actions and objectives.
3. Streamflow is foundational to healthy environments and recreation, both of which support tourism industries that are important drivers for local economies. Encourage use of existing or new tools and projects to keep water in streams
4. Environment and recreation interests have largely overlapping goals, but there can be situations where they are not perfectly aligned (such as streamflow needs or infrastructure projects). There is support for both the environmental and recreational projects, but recreation-based projects should avoid adverse impacts to the environment.
5. There is a desire to continue to build capacity for watershed planning (e.g. Stream Management Plans, Integrated Water Management Plans, Watershed Assessments, Water Plan grants, and recreational needs.)
6. There is a strong desire to better establish and support work in the nexus between forest health and watersheds. Healthy forested watersheds maintain flow regimes at historic conditions; resist, absorb, and recover from natural hazards; provide high quality water supply for agriculture, municipal, and environment; and provide diverse and complex habitat features in upland and riverine environments.
7. Thriving watersheds means:
  - a. A commitment to maintain public benefits of Colorado's quality of life and economy through healthy watersheds, rivers and streams, and wildlife.
  - b. Adequate streamflows to support fisheries, recreation, and habitat maintenance for water-dependent natural environments. A healthy environment depends upon good water quality, connectivity of streams, and robust instream and riparian habitats.
  - c. Long-term sustainability and environmental resiliency to provide for a functional ecosystem in the face of a number of pressures from competing water needs to climate-stressed hydrologies.

### ***Robust Agriculture Themes***

Staff hosted seven workshops that engaged 430 stakeholders focusing on agricultural production, food systems, urban and rural collaboration, and drought response. These workshops were hosted in partnership with:

- Colorado Ag Water Alliance
- Ditch and Reservoir Company Alliance,
- Colorado Department of Agriculture
- Irrigation Innovation Consortium
- Colorado State University (Food Systems)
- Colorado Master Irrigator
- Ogallala Coordinated Agriculture Project

The major themes that emerged from the scoping phase for robust agriculture are listed below:

1. Climate change & associated natural disasters pose the most significant risk to the long-term productivity and resiliency of Colorado agriculture and food systems.
2. Communities where both agriculture and groundwater are critical to the local economy will likely face the most acute water resource and economic challenges associated with changing water supply conditions, which calls for targeted investment in innovative solutions to encourage groundwater conservation and recovery.
3. The update presents an opportunity to reflect the diversity of Colorado agriculture, by highlighting the unique water/climate challenges affecting historically underserved producers, acequias, Tribes, and farmworkers and ensuring these stakeholders have an equal opportunity to participate in the update process.
4. Locally-led solutions to water resource challenges ranging from aging infrastructure to groundwater management are preferable to top-down ones, however, local organizations

typically lack sufficient resources such as staffing or funding to scale programming to achieve broader impact presenting a role for state investment.

### ***Vibrant Communities Themes***

The scoping outreach in this action area included several targeted interviews with key stakeholders, and three workshops hosted in partnership with the Water and Land Use Alliance, Rocky Mountain Section of AWWA Conservation Committee, and the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute that engaged about 160 stakeholders collectively. The themes that emerged from these outreach events are listed below along with some ideas raised in these events that supported the themes.

1. Support for better institutionalization of water and land use planning.
  - a. Specific concepts discussed in scoping that supported this theme were the idea of building in resilience through greater institutionalization, and the concept of cultural change as necessary to establish the connections between the land and water planning fields, which have historically been handled separately. This may also include measures to manage special districts better between jurisdictions so that land and water planning in those areas can be effectively linked. At a minimum, this would mean incorporating water, and specifically water efficiency, into Comprehensive Plans in a more established way.
2. Support for increased outdoor water efficiency.
  - a. This could include some elements of turf retirement and supported conversion to lower water use landscapes. It could also include ways to incentivize high efficiency, high-density development. Other channels discussed were the concepts of a statewide landscaper certification and the widespread implementation of water budgets and conservation-oriented tap fees.
3. Data limitations and proliferation.
  - a. This theme emerged in conversations around lack of water use data around landscape and land use type. It also is supported by conversations about the need to develop consistent water efficiency (savings) methodology, and the challenge of getting data in this area to be consistent and transparent.
4. Equity
  - a. This theme arose and was supported by conversations during scoping about the challenge of achieving equity in water rates, utility program participation, and representation in the field of water among water providers, policy organizations and agencies, and non-governmental organizations in this field.

### ***Resilient Planning Themes***

In an uncertain future, resilience and adaptability will become increasingly important. In order to promote equity in water awareness and engagement, CWCB aims to promote inclusivity in water discussions to broaden outreach and ensure all Coloradans are aware of important water challenges and know how to address and adapt to them. Resilient planning also means fostering supportive governmental policies and providing equitable funding opportunities. During the scoping process the first meetings of the Water Equity Task Force were held, as well as an educational scoping workshop, engaging about 150 participants in total. Key themes of work in this action area include:

1. Resilience
  - a. In various outreach forums the theme of resilience to future change arose. Being resilient means making strategic decisions and managing our future risks, and this will be a topic explored in greater detail during drafting.
2. Inclusivity/Equity
  - a. The scoping efforts reinforced support for ever greater levels of inclusivity from different sectors, cultures and perspectives in ways that are truly representative of

Colorado as it grows and changes. The Water Equity Task Force held its first meetings in May. This group explored themes such as the rural/urban divide in Colorado, and the value of having more voices from new people in our planning conversations.

3. Education and Awareness
  - a. During the Education Workshop on May 6th, conversations centered on how much the PEPO liaisons contribute currently and the desire to put more resources in place to support them and help them collaborate with each other to educate their local communities as a trusted resource. Other emerging themes from that conversation included the desire to develop a pipeline of young people from a range of backgrounds to work in water and help us develop innovative and interdisciplinary solutions to our future water challenges.
4. Supportive Government
  - a. This theme continues to be significant, and it was also highlighted in the original water plan. Ideas that have come from scoping in this area include the need to create pathways for all of the areas in the Water Plan to be successful, including possibly creating or amending policy, regulation or rules that are conducive to increased resilience. This may also include working to find partnerships in and outside of government to create solutions.

### ***Cross-Cutting Themes***

The Water Plan will include cross-cutting themes that transcend different action areas and provide benefits to cities, farms, streams and people. Many of the emerging themes identified in the action areas above have cross-cutting significance. These might include equity, land use planning, climate change, and funding. These themes may be highlighted in specific action areas in the update and referenced throughout the document.

### **Next Steps in the Water Plan Update Process**

While the Scoping Phase has come to a close, there are several key inputs that staff will still be working to capture as drafting begins.

#### **Ongoing Inputs and Collaboration**

##### ***CWCB Board***

The CWCB Board will be updated at regular intervals during the drafting phase and will also have key opportunities to review and provide input on the direction of the draft as it is being developed.

##### ***Water Resources Review Committee***

A presentation to the Water Resources Review Committee is planned for fall 2021 to brief the committee on the status of the Water Plan update. In the interim, it is anticipated that CWCB will invite legislators to attend CWCB Board meetings to get regular updates as the drafting progresses over the next several months.

##### ***Water Equity Task Force***

The Water Equity Task Force is intended to better understand existing equity, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) challenges related to Colorado water issues. Input from this group, combined with other stakeholder input, will help inform the Water Plan update. The task force will host a fall workshop for the public and two additional meetings over the next year. The [first task force meeting](#) was held May 18th and more information about the task force's work is available [here](#).

### **Completed Basin Implementation Plans**

At the end of June 2021, the basin roundtables finalized the draft of their [Basin Implementation Plans](#). These plans frame regional values and offer strategies for how each basin's future water needs will be addressed at the local level. These plans are at the heart of the Water Plan and the strategies and projects identified in this work will be filtered into the Water Plan update once these plans are finalized in January 2022. Next steps for the basin implementation plans include:

- **July 2021:** BIP drafts will be reviewed for consistency by the BIP general contractor, Brown & Caldwell, and the AGO.
- **August 20 - September 13:** BIPs will be posted on [engagewcwb.org](#) for roundtable/ roundtable BIP subcommittee review (as determined by each RT).
- **October 13 - November 16:** BIPs will be posted for public review and comment
- **January 2022:** BIPs will be finalized.

### **Drafting Phase Process**

During the drafting phase staff will be working privately on drafting and will have fewer public events, but will work to share early concepts and direction as soon as the September Board meeting. A few notes about the structure and schedule for drafting are below.

- **Structure:** The update will be in a two-volume format (Volume 1 and Volume 2 or V1 and V2), with one version (V1) concise and action-focused, and one version (V2) more explanatory of overarching concepts. This is consistent with formats for the Technical Update and BIP updates.
  - **Volume 1:** Staff will focus their drafting efforts on the shorter Volume 1 document. The strategy for the update aims to bring the Water Plan update down to below 200 pages, as compared to the 500+ pages of the original plan. This shorter format aligns closely with the plans of other leading states in water and resiliency planning. The Volume 1 content will focus on an executive level walk-through of water in Colorado, new context setting since 2015, emerging areas and themes of significance and laying out supporting actions that align with the values in the Water Plan/the four action areas.
  - **Volume 2:** The 2015 Water Plan will be reformatted to align with this new two-volume structure and will comprise much of the basis for Volume 2 of the update. Given this, the Water Plan update is not anticipated to be drastically different in terms of its overarching content.
- **Schedule:** Staff expect to have a 75% draft of the plan by the March 2022 Board meeting but will need time to go through internal revisions and formatting before sharing anything publicly. Because the document is expected to be much shorter and there are many areas where cross-cutting themes will be included across several sections, the full update will be released as one package for review rather than in sections as was done previously.
- The board will be engaged throughout the process and asked to provide input especially as drafting takes shape.

### **Timeline for Next Steps**

- Jul. 2021 Board Meeting / Drafting Begins
- Jan. 2022 Basin Implementation Plans Finalized
- Feb. 2022 Water Equity Task Force Feedback Summary
- Apr. 2022 Internal Draft Review
- Jun. 2022 Public Comment Period
- Oct. 2022 Public Comment Period Ends
- Dec. 2022 Edits Made & Colorado Water Plan Finalized



