

# DROUGHT

## A LOOMING THREAT TO A LEADING INDUSTRY

### DROUGHTS OF THE PAST ARE NOT THE SAME AS DROUGHTS OF THE FUTURE



The Agricultural Impact Task Force, convened by Governor Polis in [June 2020](#), is a coalition of state, federal, and agricultural association partners working together for the future of agriculture. The Task Force requests an opportunity to share emerging solutions summarized in this interim report with policymakers.

### WHAT CAN WE DO?



2021 is projected to be hot and dry again. Drought is not a short-term hazard or temporary policy issue. In disaster and non-disaster years, adaptation responses must unite federal, state, municipal, and farm- and ranch-level solutions to address the reality of long-term aridification.

### AGRICULTURE COMMUNITIES BEAR THE BRUNT OF OUR DRYING LANDSCAPE

**NOW IS THE TIME TO INVEST IN OUR FOOD SUPPLY AND RURAL RESILIENCE**

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS



- Advance agricultural priorities through processes such as the Colorado Water Plan (2022) and Colorado Resiliency Framework (2020) updates
- Pursue creative, nimble interagency and inter-industry coordination to support community-led, localized response efforts
- Provide direct adaptation support for agricultural communities such as mental health resources, conflict resolution assistance, and risk management guidance
- Explore alternatives or amendments to how (and how quickly) disaster aid is made available based on drought and climate indicators including, but not limited to, the US Drought Monitor
- Support new revenue streams at local, state, and national levels for incentivized ecosystem markets that generate meaningful benefits to human health, climate, biodiversity, air, water, and wildlife
- Leverage drought, wildfire, flood, and pandemic recovery funding for multi-hazard resilience
- Boldly invest in our water future through infrastructure modernization and storage, soil health practices, drought-resistant crops, food asset infrastructure, and advanced drought monitoring

# COLORADO AG: THE FRONT LINES OF DROUGHT AND A CHANGING CLIMATE



2020 is the first time since 2012 that 100% of the state was in drought. Other recent severe droughts include 2002, 2012, and 2018. Major drivers of the severe drought in 2020 include absent monsoon seasons, accruing soil moisture deficits, record high temperatures, and extreme evaporative demands from winds, low humidities, high temperatures.

## THE DROUGHT-WILDFIRE CONNECTION



On the heels of the 2018 drought and in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020's drought disaster hit agricultural producers hardest. A warm spring, dry summer, and critically hot autumn with complete lack of monsoonal moisture contributed to 2020's record breaking fires.

Historically, Colorado's largest wildfires occur in June following poor winter snowpack and early spring melts. However, the rapid and intense expansion of the Cameron Peak and East Troublesome fires occurred in October - an unprecedented phenomenon, in part, attributable to severe drought.

## ECONOMIC LOSS



Multi-year or compounding hazards (such as the 2018 drought, 2019 freeze, 2020 drought and wildfires) take deep economic and ecological tolls on agricultural and landscape-based economies such as tourism and recreation.

These record-breaking events will impact agricultural and rural communities for years to come. The cost of reduced water holding capacity in headwaters, erosion and sedimentation, water quality management, and planning for future natural resource stewardship is unequally placed on farmers, ranchers and rural communities.

**BY 2050, DROUGHT MAY COST COLORADO AN ADDITIONAL \$830M IN EXPECTED ANNUAL DAMAGES WITH \$511M FROM AGRICULTURAL DAMAGES ALONE\***

\*damage cost data from [FACE:Hazards](#), a new avoided cost tool from DHSEM, CWCB, and FEMA



## WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN 2021

Climate outlooks for 2021 indicate drought conditions are expected to continue next year. Should conditions persist or reservoirs not refill this winter, more economic sectors and urban regions will feel acute impacts of prolonged drought.

## THANKS TO THESE PARTNERS

CO Dept of Agriculture (Co-Chair)	CO Agriculture Commission	CO Potato Administrative Committee
CSU Water Center (Co-Chair)	CO Agriculture Council	Natural Resource Conservation Service
CO Water Conservation Board (Co-chair)	CO Cattleman's Association	Farm Services Agency
CO State Conservation Board	CO Corn	US Forest Service
CO State Land Board	CO Farm Bureau	Bureau of Land Management
CSU Extension	Rocky Mountain Farmers Union	US Dept of Agriculture
CO Climate Center	CO Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association	USDA Rural Development

For more information, visit [bit.ly/codroughtreport](https://bit.ly/codroughtreport)