COLORADO
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Department of Natural Resources

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Water Plan

Water Project Summary

Name of Applicant	Sonoran Institute	
Name of Water Project	Colorado Growing Water Smart	
Grant Request Amount		**$370,071.24**
Primary Category		$370,071.24
Conservation & Land Use Planning		
Total Applicant Match		**$0.00**
Applicant Cash Match		
Applicant In-Kind Match		
Total Other Sources of Funding		**$154,000.00**
Northern Water		$75,000.00
Denver Water		$55,000.00
In Kind Hours		$24,000.00
Total Project Cost		**$524,071.24**

Applicant & Grantee Information

Name of Grantee: Sonoran Institute
Mailing Address: 5049 E. Broadway Blvd. Suite 127 Tucson AZ 85711

Organization Contact: Meryl Corbin
Position/Title: Director, Growing Water Smart
Phone: 913-669-8373
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Organization Contact - Alternate: Mike Zellner
Position/Title: CEO
Phone:
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Grant Management Contact: Meryl Corbin
Position/Title: Director, Growing Water Smart
Phone: 913-669-8373
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Grant Management Contact - Alternate: Noah Kaiser
Position/Title:
Phone:
Email: nkaiser@sonoraninstitute.org

Description of Grantee/Applicant

No description provided

Type of Eligible Entity

- ☐ Public (Government)
- ☐ Public (District)

- [ ] Public (Municipality)
- [ ] Ditch Company
- [ ] Private Incorporated
- [ ] Private Individual, Partnership, or Sole Proprietor
- [x] 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.
- [x] 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	39.789300
Longitude	-105.035560
Lat Long Flag	Default/Proponent headquarters: If the location cannot be defined with flags above, use location of project proponent headquarters
Water Source	
Basins	Metro; South Platte
Counties	Boulder; Denver; Larimer; Weld; Broomfield
Districts	

Water Project Overview

Major Water Use Type	Municipal
Type of Water Project	Capacity Building
Scheduled Start Date - Design	1/1/2026
Scheduled Start Date - Construction	

Description

Sonoran Institute (SI), in partnership with the Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, proposes three key activities to expand and deepen the impact of the Growing Water Smart (GWS) program. First, SI will deliver a GWS workshop for communities in the Denver Metro area. This multi-day training will convene water providers, land use planners, and elected officials from six municipalities, representing approximately 330,000 Coloradans, to advance integrated land and water planning strategies that support long-term resilience.

Second, SI will provide technical assistance grants to four to six past GWS communities. These grants will help implement locally identified projects such as updating land use codes, aligning zoning with water availability, improving water use data analysis, or advancing water efficiency and demand management.

Third, SI will pilot an impact assessment of the GWS program. This effort will review materials from 27 Northern Water communities, conduct interviews, and produce summary memos and a regional opportunities report. Findings will inform a model for ongoing GWS evaluation, targeted technical support, and single-day engagements.

Together, these activities will strengthen community capacity, advance implementation of integrated strategies, and establish a replicable framework for expanding water and land use planning support across Colorado.

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
1,234,000 Number of Coloradans Impacted by Engagement Activity
Other

Coloradans Impacted by Engagement Calculation:
Denver Water Workshop: The proposed Denver Water Growing Water Smart workshop will engage up to six communities. Possible communities: Cherry Hills Village, Greenwood Village, Lakewood, Centennial, Cherry Creek, and Wheat Ridge. Based on 2024 population estimates, these communities represent a combined population of approximately 330,000 Coloradans.

Northern Water Pilot: According to Northern Water, the district serves an estimated 1,021,000 residents. 27 allottees have participated in a Growing Water Smart workshop which represents 88.5% of the population, which is approximately 904,000 Coloradans.

Water Project Justification

The 2015 Colorado Water Plan recognized that integrating land use and water planning is essential to Colorado's long-term water resilience. In Chapter 6: Water Supply Management, Section 6.3.3: Land Use (page 6-89), the Plan notes that "water providers and land use planners must coordinate efforts so that water demand impacts are understood and so that future development fits within the limitations of a community's water supply." It set a measurable objective that "by 2025, 75% of Coloradans will live in communities that have incorporated water-saving actions into land use planning."

The Growing Water Smart (GWS) program directly supports this goal. Since 2017, Sonoran Institute (SI), in partnership with the Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy, has provided GWS workshops, technical assistance, and peer learning to community teams representing approximately 68% of the state's population.

These workshops support local governments in aligning land use and water resources, assessing supply and demand trends, and building support for policies that promote long-term sustainability.

The 2023 Colorado Water Plan reaffirms this priority. In Chapter 5: Challenges and Tools, GWS is cited on page 163 as one of three key resources for land use and water integration. The Plan underscores that “as Colorado grows, integrated land use and water planning must be considered the minimum standard for moving forward.” In Chapter 6: Vibrant Communities (page 187), GWS is highlighted for its lasting impact—empowering policymakers, creating leadership pipelines, and strengthening relationships with initiatives like the Colorado Water and Land Use Planning Alliance.

Depending on a community’s specific needs and goals, GWS participation can contribute to advancing multiple Water Plan Visions and Agency Actions. It equips teams of local leaders, planners, and water resource managers with five toolboxes: Visioning and Planning, Adequate Water Supply Standards, Water-Smart Land Use Planning, Healthy and Resilient Watersheds, and Water-Efficient Demand Management Programs. In addition to these foundational elements, the program has sought to better integrate agriculture into its curriculum and dialogue. For example, the Bridging the Gap report, completed in collaboration with key partners, water providers and conservation organizations, examines the impacts of water transfer projects including agricultural-to-municipal water transfers and offers communities tools to support more sustainable, equitable, and resilient water resource planning.

Related Studies

The Growing Water Smart program is supported by several studies and, in turn, supports several other programs. These include Sonoran Institute’s Growing Water Smart Metrics: Tracking the Integration of Water and Land Use Planning (2020), Northwest Colorado Council of Government Water Quality and Quantity Committee’s Water Savings Resource Guide and Model Provisions for the Colorado Headwaters Region, Bridging the Gap Report (2024), and the Babbitt Center for Land and Water Policy’s Incorporating Water into Comprehensive Planning: A Manual for Land Use Planners in the Colorado River Basin.

Conversely, graduates of the Growing Water Smart workshop often go on to work with WaterNow Alliance and Western Resource Advocates’ Project Accelerator or join CWCB and DOLA’s Colorado Water and Land Use Planning Alliance.

Taxpayer Bill of Rights

We are a non-profit organization, and are not aware of any TABOR issues that may affect our application.