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**water**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Water is the lifeblood of Boulder County. Our rivers, streams, and reservoirs provide clean drinking water for nearby cities and towns and are an essential habitat to our fish and wildlife populations. Our water is critical to supporting the economy, from farming to recreational tourism.

Boulder County supports sustainable water resource management practices and regulations to achieve water conservation. In Boulder County, we believe that healthy water quality and a sustainable water supply depend on the entire community, from the Board of County Commissioners, who develop and approve policy, to the

businesses and residents who conserve water resources.

As a headwaters county, Boulder County enjoys relatively pristine water quality from mountain sources, and we are responsible for improving water quality downstream. Over the past decade, Boulder County

has committed to partnerships with communities working together to protect our water quality and coordinate watershed management.

In addition, we know that conserving water resources is a top priority among Boulder County residents. To this end, we are continuing to expand our sustainability services to offer water efficiency and conservation tools for our residents and business owners.

Water is a precious natural resource, particularly in the semi-arid climate of Colorado, and Boulder County is committed to ensuring that the county's future generations have clean and abundant water.



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**water goal**

Continue to implement water efficiency and water quality efforts that ensure sufficient clean water for healthy ecosystems and human use.

**COUNTY OPERATION STRATEGIES**

## Continue improving water efficiency and maintain the water supply on Parks & Open Space agricultural properties

- Leverage policies and programs in existing Parks and Open Space Water and Cropland Policies and Management Plans.
- Advocate for local and state policies that help maintain agricultural viability, and preserve open-space values by retaining stream and ditch water supplies on irrigated lands throughout Boulder County.
- Continue support of irrigation system improvements on county property that supply water to communities and agricultural producers.
- Work with water rights holders and farmers on Boulder County agricultural properties to employ practices that increase soil capacity for water retention and reduce water use.
- Identify and prioritize ecosystem and in-stream-flow protection needs to aid species recovery and provide areas for aquatic wildlife habitat and recreational activities, with limited reliance on west slope diversions.

## Reduce Boulder County facilities' indoor water usage

- Ensure that new county buildings meet all of the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system points within the water efficiency section of the USGBC new construction certification process.
- Require the use of low-flow "WaterSense" rate fixtures for all new and retrofit applications in county facilities.
- Develop a targeted plan to reduce indoor water use.

**COUNTY OPERATION STRATEGIES**

## Reduce outdoor water use at Boulder County facilities

- Repair, upgrade, and adjust all irrigation systems with the most efficient available technologies, incorporating weather and soil conditions to minimize demand.
- Finalize square-foot data collection and service charges for all water-related utilities (drinking water, sewage, storm water) on irrigated landscapes.
- Create and implement a plan to replace 25% of irrigated turf with more water-efficient landscaping around county buildings by 2030.

## Assess current and future drought and related vulnerabilities caused by increased climate and weather variability, population growth, and development

- Develop common data repositories for all water sources, for unincorporated Boulder County residents and for water rights held by Boulder County.
- Update the County Comprehensive Plan to establish and update water related goals, and utilize updates in regulatory documents, such as the Land Use Code, to support implementation of these goals.
- Map groundwater within Boulder County to assess for drought vulnerabilities, carrying capacity, threats to water quality, and locations where private water supplies may be at risk.
- Compile information on soil moisture and other drought-related data from county agencies and incorporated areas.
- Enhance water-conservation-related components of the Land Use Code and participate in regional planning efforts to ensure that planning for new development within Boulder County and the Denver metro region adequately addresses water supply constraints and vulnerabilities.
- Support coordinated climate change response strategies for use by Boulder County water providers through a collaborative forum.

**COMMUNITY STRATEGIES**

**Protect and improve watershed health to secure an enduring supply of high-quality source water, while protecting the wildlife habitat, stream system functions, and aesthetics of our natural environment**

- Participate in the Keep It Clean Partnership and other intergovernmental agreements to minimize pollution impacts on surface waters.
- Collaborate with external multistakeholder watershed groups to promote healthy watersheds through water quality monitoring, stream stewardship and restoration projects, fire mitigation, public education, and other related activities while integrating efforts with the Boulder County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
- Identify stream segments on Colorado’s list of impaired waters within or downstream of county properties, and prioritize management actions where progress can be made toward attainment of water quality standards.
- Develop post-wildfire restoration plans to protect watersheds from mudslides and increased runoff, and reduce the risk of flooding to downstream assets.
- Assess and minimize negative impacts on water quality from oil and gas exploration and development.
- Expand efforts to reduce stormwater runoff in the upper watersheds and nonurbanized areas of Boulder County.
- Improve forest health and maintenance in order to reduce wildland fire impacts to source waters.
- Ensure that natural resource extraction is conducted in ways that protect riparian areas and water quality.
- Coordinate with local water providers and engage in local source-water protection planning efforts.
- Complete remediation of ranked abandoned mine sites.
- Develop infrastructure and support policies for off-stream watering of livestock that protects riparian vegetation and water quality.
- Support local water quality monitoring efforts and facilitate data sharing to inform decision-making and provide a thorough understanding of watershed health.

**COMMUNITY STRATEGIES**

**Ensure that all on-site wastewater treatment systems are permitted and approved**

- Ensure all wastewater treatment applications will be reviewed and evaluated by Boulder County Public Health to ensure that they meet Boulder County wastewater treatment regulations that are a part of all property sales transactions.
- Conduct outreach to high-risk geographic areas likely to be impacted by aging and unapproved wastewater treatment.
- Maintain regulations to employ the best practices and technologies to protect groundwater.
- Maintain an active outreach and permitting process for unpermitted and unapproved wastewater treatment in Boulder County.
- Identify areas where on-site wastewater treatment systems may pose a risk to groundwater.

**Support water education and conservation efforts for Boulder County residents and businesses**

- Engage with statewide education campaigns and any new collaborative water conservation education initiatives to promote efficient residential water use.
- Facilitate consistent messaging throughout Boulder County on water conservation strategies.
- Expand existing youth water education programs to include water conservation and source water protection.
- Ensure proper water efficiency measures for all new, remodel, and addition projects by updating to the 2021 Building Codes, as well as utilizing WaterSense requirements for larger homes, and include water efficiency retrofits in the BuildSmart code.
- Educate residents and businesses on chemical applications for landscaping and snow removal that have adverse impacts on water quality.
- Support turf replacement programs and promote transition to more water-efficient landscaping in both unincorporated Boulder County and incorporated areas in partnership with water districts and other entities.
- Provide installation of water-efficient valves and faucets and messaging on irrigation efficiency to businesses through the Partners for a Clean Environment program.



**BUSINESS SAVES WATER**

For more than a decade, Boulder County’s Partners for a Clean Environment (PACE) program has worked with local businesses and municipal operations to reduce their stormwater pollution and systematically standardize water efficiency. In past years, dozens of businesses have become certified in PACE’s water conservation area of excellence.

Studio Z Dental in Louisville is now using 77% less water than the average dental office. After installing a waterless suction system and auto shut-off pumps at each hand-washing sink, more than 200,000 gallons per year will be saved. This business has since voluntarily implemented environmentally responsible purchasing practices, as well as composting and recycling programs for their office staff and clients.



**POLICY PRIORITIES**

The following are environmental sustainability policy priorities within Boulder County’s legislative agenda:

**POLICY**

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW**

**Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience associated with water management through water conservation, efficiency, reuse, adaptation, and low-impact development strategies**

- Support state regulation and other policy means to protect water quality.
- Support legislation that promotes the efficient utilization and conservation of water.
- Maintain adequate funding for the enforcement of safe and high-quality drinking water standards.
- Support resolution to conflicts between the federal Endangered Species Act and state water law.





## Water Conservation

Boulder County continues to explore innovative ways to encourage water conservation among its residents. For years, public policy polling and community surveys have reported water conservation as a top priority.

In partnership with a local environmental nonprofit, ReSource Central, Boulder County has installed nearly 2,000 high-efficiency toilets. Over the lifetime of the program, it is estimated that 539 million gallons of water will be conserved. That is enough to supply every household in the county with water for almost eight days.



TAKE ACTION

### Saving Water

There are numerous ways to take action to save water. Here are just a few:

- ❑ Install water-efficient toilets, showerheads, and faucet aerators.
- ❑ Check all faucets, toilets, and showerheads for leaks.
- ❑ Only run the dishwasher when it is completely full.
- ❑ Share information with coworkers about how to conserve water indoors and outdoors.
- ❑ Have your irrigation system audited for leaks, broken equipment, overspray, or inefficient watering schedules.
- ❑ Learn and share about where your community’s water supply comes from and how it is treated through a community tour.



RESOURCES

### More Information

**Parks & Open Space Water Policy**  
[assets.bouldercounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/water-policy.pdf](https://assets.bouldercounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/water-policy.pdf)

**Parks & Open Space Cropland Policy**  
[bouldercounty.org/open-space/management/cropland-policy](https://bouldercounty.org/open-space/management/cropland-policy)

**Ways to Save Water**  
[ResourceCentral.org](https://ResourceCentral.org)

[LoveColoradoWater.org](https://LoveColoradoWater.org)

[ColoradoWaterWise.org](https://ColoradoWaterWise.org)

[PACEPartners.com](https://PACEPartners.com)

**Help Prevent Water Pollution**  
[keepitcleanpartnership.org](https://keepitcleanpartnership.org)

