

FACT SHEET

Colorado Water Plan

COLORADO'S WATER SUPPLIES ARE INCREASINGLY VARIABLE

yet water demands are growing. That's where the Colorado Water Plan comes in. Published in 2015, Colorado's first state water plan aims to bridge a gap between available water supply and demand that is projected by mid-century. The plan is built on three values: a productive economy, efficient and effective water infrastructure, and a strong environment.

Coloradans have been implementing the water plan and, now, work is underway to update the plan. The water gap and other projections have been updated by the state, and stakeholders from every river basin across Colorado are considering this new data, assessing progress they've made, and reevaluating their priorities. By 2022, an updated Colorado Water Plan is expected to guide the next phase of the state's water future.

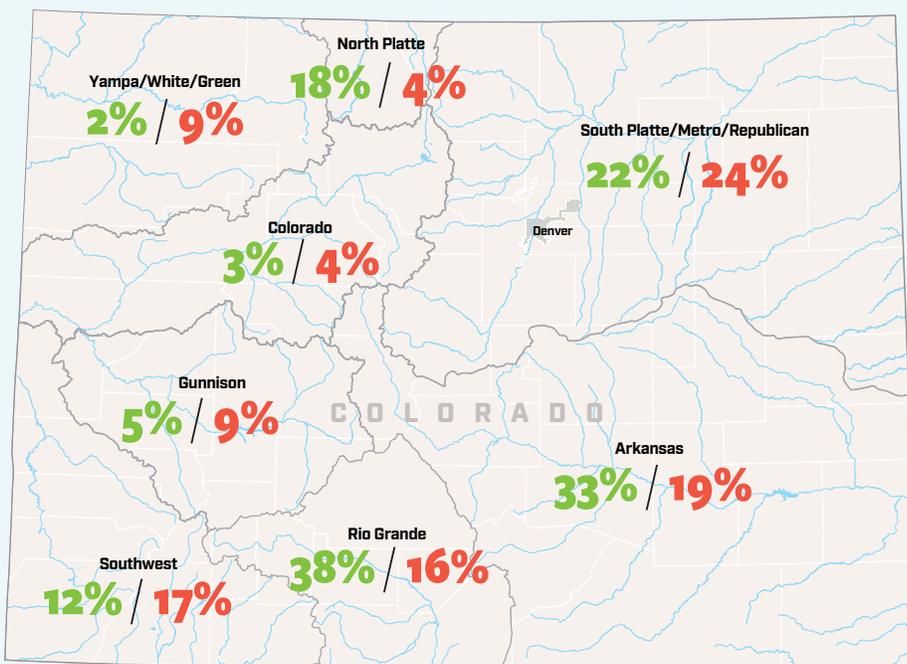
How does the future look in 2050?

The Colorado Water Plan uses a scenario planning approach to evaluate a range of possible futures. Water supply and demand are impacted by variables including the severity of climate change, societal values, the pace of economic development, and population growth, among others. The latest statewide projections, from 2019, which will be incorporated into the 2022 water plan update, look at five probable scenarios to estimate the gaps between future water supplies and demands. Under the most stressed future scenario, "Hot Growth," population has rapidly grown, regulations are lax, and the climate is increasingly hot and dry. Under the least stressed scenario, "Weak Economy," population growth is low, as are greenhouse gas emissions, so climate change hasn't accelerated. Based on those assumptions by scenario, the gap between available water supply and water demand is projected to widen by varying degrees for different sectors. Agriculture, which already experiences gaps in available supply (shown in graph as the baseline ag gap), could see gaps increase (shown in graph as the incremental ag gap) by 18 to 43 percent statewide or between 440,000 and more than 1 million acre-feet per year by 2050. The statewide municipal and industrial (M&I) gap is projected to be between 250,000 to 750,000 acre-feet per year.

Percent of annual water demand unmet under a business-as-usual scenario

If Colorado continues conducting business as usual, most basins in the state will see a gap between available water supply and demand by 2050 for agricultural and municipal and industrial (M&I) uses.

Ag Average annual percent gap / M&I Percent gap in maximum year



Statewide gap estimates by planning scenario

Five different scenarios reveal varying gaps by sector between Colorado water supply and demand by 2050.



Source: Analysis and Technical Update to the Colorado Water Plan, 2019

What are we aiming for?

The 2015 water plan contains eight measurable objectives that are being used to track progress around the state. These goals have dictated how state grant funding is allocated and have helped individuals, basin roundtables, and local and state agencies prioritize projects. It is yet unknown whether these measurable objectives will be used in the 2022 update or if the water plan will be restructured.

SUPPLY-DEMAND GAP

Zero

municipal and industrial gap closed by 2030

CONSERVATION

400,000 acre-feet

of municipal and industrial water conserved by 2050

LAND USE

75 percent

of Coloradans living in communities that incorporate water-saving actions into land use planning by 2025

AGRICULTURE

50,000 acre-feet

of agricultural water shared through voluntary alternative transfer methods by 2030

STORAGE

400,000 acre-feet

of additional water storage by 2050

WATERSHED HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT, AND RECREATION

80 percent

of locally prioritized rivers covered with stream management plans and 80 percent of critical watersheds covered with watershed protection plans by 2030

FUNDING

\$100 million

in additional revenue raised annually, starting in 2020, to sustainably fund the implementation of the Colorado Water Plan

EDUCATION, OUTREACH, AND INNOVATION

Engage Coloradans statewide

on at least five key water challenges that should be addressed by 2030 and significantly improve the level of public awareness and engagement regarding water issues statewide

Need to know

Acre-foot Volumetric measurement of water. One acre-foot of water covers an acre of land at a depth of one foot, and equals 325,851 gallons.

Alternative Transfer Method (ATM)

Various water sharing agreements that meet municipal or environmental needs without permanent reductions in irrigated agriculture.

Basin Roundtable

Groups active in water planning in each of the state's eight major river basins, as well as the metro area, and which include water stakeholders representing diverse interests including agricultural, environmental, municipal and more. Roundtables develop local Basin Implementation Plans, which inform the state water plan.

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Lead agency for state water policy and planning, with a managing and funding role for the Colorado Water Plan.

River Basin

Land through which a river and its tributaries flow.

Stream Management Plan (SMP)

Data-driven river health assessments that help communities understand and prioritize how to protect or enhance environmental and recreational assets.

RESOURCES

Colorado Water Plan: <https://bit.ly/3izPNbr>
 Analysis and Technical Update to the Colorado Water Plan: <https://bit.ly/3bWqIGx>
 Engage with the Colorado Water Conservation Board: <https://bit.ly/3qH1Jew>

Colorado Water Plan Timeline



Produced by Water Education Colorado, an independent and nonpartisan nonprofit working to ensure Coloradans are informed on water issues, in collaboration with its news initiative, Fresh Water News.

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