



**COLORADO  
WATER CENTER**  
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY



*Connecting*

Expertise

*Convening*

Conversations

*Catalyzing*

Collaboration



**2025** Annual Report



**COLORADO WATER CENTER**

*Currents of Change*



## **Greetings from the Colorado Water Center Director**

As the incoming Director of the Colorado Water Center, it is my honor to present the 2025 Annual Report, which highlights a year of shared achievements in advancing water research, education, and engagement.

This year marked a historic milestone for the Center – our 60th anniversary. For six decades, the Colorado Water Center has been at the forefront of efforts to address the state’s most pressing water challenges, serving as a hub for innovation, collaboration, and community engagement. This anniversary is a testament to the enduring legacy of the Center and the incredible contributions of the researchers, educators, students, and partners who have shaped its success over the years. As we celebrate this momentous occasion, I am honored to step into the role of Director and build upon the strong foundation laid by my predecessors, while charting a path forward to ensure the continued vitality of Colorado’s water resources.

This year was also one of transition and growth, as we welcomed new leadership and expanded our talented team to enhance our impact across the state and beyond. With fresh perspectives and renewed energy, the Colorado Water Center is better equipped than ever to respond to pressing needs around sustainable water management, drought resilience, and training the next generation of water leaders. From water user-driven research initiatives to innovative educational and workforce development programs, 2025 has been a year of progress, partnership, and possibility.

I am deeply grateful for the support of partners and stakeholders during this exciting time and invite you to join us in celebrating our legacy while looking ahead to the future. Together, we are committed to ensuring that Colorado’s water future remains vibrant and secure for generations to come.



Sincerely,  
Karen Schlatter

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Karen Schlatter'.

Colorado Water Center Director

# Who We Are

The Colorado Water Center is one of 54 Water Resources Research Institutes created by the Water Resources Act of 1964, which collectively form the National Institutes for Water Resources.

As a division under Colorado State University's (CSU) Office of Engagement and Extension, the Center aims to connect all water expertise in Colorado's higher education system with the research and education needs of Colorado's water managers and users, building on the rich water history at Colorado State University.

## Our Mission

We facilitate outreach, education, and applied transdisciplinary research to address complex and evolving water-related challenges facing Colorado, the West, and beyond by:

- Building relationships between higher education and Colorado's water institutions.
- Providing Colorado communities with the skills and knowledge to engage in water discussions.
- Educating and inspiring the next generation of water leaders.

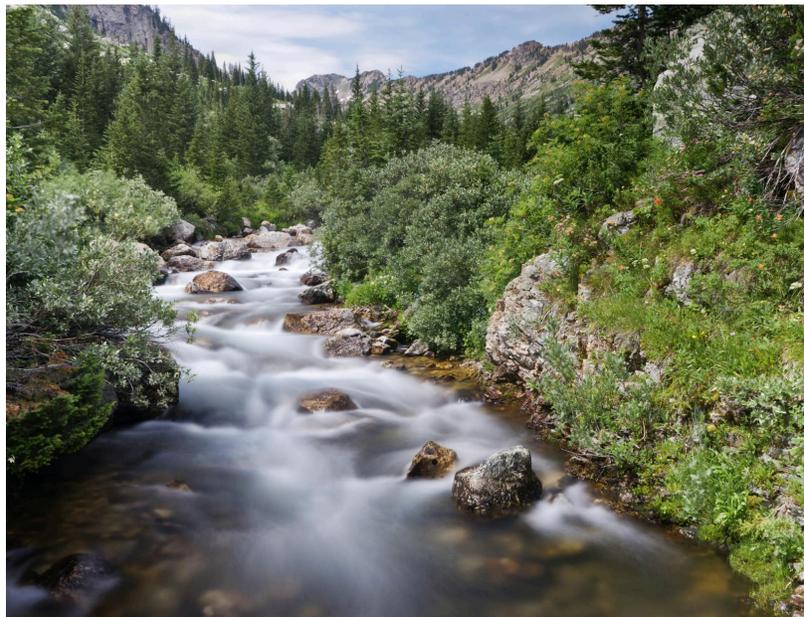
## Our Focus

### Provide Education and Training

- Empower Colorado's water leaders to secure and advocate for our valuable freshwater resources.
- Support water education through undergraduate and graduate-level course and program offerings, Extension programs for Colorado communities, professional development, and K-12 learning initiatives.
- Disseminate water knowledge across a broad range of topics and disciplines.

### Facilitate the Development and Use of Actionable Water Science

- Foster university, faculty, and student-led research across the state.
- Connect university research to key information needs of water resource stakeholders in Colorado and beyond.



### Catalyze Meaningful Collaboration and Engagement

- Serve as a primary nexus between Colorado's institutions of higher learning and a diversity of water resource stakeholders, including state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, community members, the private sector, and our global network of partners and affiliates.
- Bridge the gaps between community members, scientists, and policymakers by strengthening water literacy.
- Connect diverse water stakeholders to higher education resources and expertise needed to ensure clean and reliable water for all.
- Facilitate and support collaborative water dialogues and projects.



**814,465**  
Media Reach



**3,773**  
Social Media Followers



**6,400+**  
Engaged Audience  
Members



**548**  
Media Mentions



**125**  
Engagement Activities



**67** Students Supported  
**6** University Collaborations  
in Colorado

# Program Highlights

## *Water Education & Workforce Development*

At the statewide level, the Colorado Water Center strengthened water education and leadership development through major programmatic milestones. As the host institution for **Colorado Project WET**, the Colorado Water Center initiated program expansion in 2025 to increase access to water education curriculum for K-12 schools in Colorado. Using the Project WET “train the trainer” model, the Center focused on building the facilitator and educator network, hosting multiple training workshops in 2025 to add 37 new Project WET facilitators and 60 CSU undergraduates as certified Project WET educators to the network.

In February 2025, the Center hosted the second annual **Water Workforce Career Fair** at CSU Spur, bringing together 180 students, water professionals and educators from across Colorado, including 38 industry and education exhibitors, to foster water workforce development opportunities.

Following the 2024 Water Workforce Summit and 2025 focus group discussions, one of the water workforce issues identified was the need for a centralized, online hub of Colorado-specific water education and workforce resources – which was also an agency action in the Colorado Water Plan.

The Colorado Water Center and Colorado Water Conservation Board partnered in 2025 to begin development of the **Water Education & Workforce Resource Hub** and initiated a survey to identify existing resources and potential resource gaps. The online hub is in development with ongoing stakeholder feedback, and the pilot site is slated to launch in June 2026.



### **Colorado Project WET**

*37 New Facilitators*

The Center additionally planned and hosted three **Water Workforce webinars** in collaboration with the US Water Alliance to better address the needs of students, communities, and industry employers across the state, region, and nation.

The **Water Literate Leaders of Northern Colorado Program** continued to expand its impact, celebrating the graduation of 21 community leaders from the program in May 2025, and welcoming 20 new leaders in the fall for the 2025-26 cohort.

Year one of the expanded **Colorado Water Fellows Program** successfully supported 46 Fellows across six partner institutions and received the Water Education Exemplar Badge in October 2025, recognizing its alignment with national educational standards and the Colorado Water Plan.

The Center also hosted the first **Colorado Water Fellows Convening**, bringing together students, faculty, and funders to celebrate program expansion, cultivate future partnerships, and equip Fellows with storytelling skills that connect research, lived experience, and community impact. Complementing this work, the **Water Leadership Summit** held in September 2025 convened more than 125 educators, policymakers, advocates, and community leaders at CSU Spur, providing practical guidance on how water policies are developed, how to engage in local and state decision-making, and how to effectively serve on boards and commissions.



### **Water Leadership Summit**

*125 Attendees*



### **Colorado Water Fellows**

*46 Students*

# Program Highlights

## Water Quality & Access

In 2025, the Colorado Water Center advanced clean water access and community resilience through targeted partnerships and direct action. In collaboration with partners, the Center supported the **Clean Water for Our Neighbors** fundraiser, raising over \$9,000 to support a **mobile home park water filter initiative**.

The Center worked closely with community partners to identify both short- and long-term strategies to address persistent water quality concerns and secured donated filters and access to advanced nano filtration systems for residents.

These efforts culminated in a December 2025 filter distribution event in Larimer County, where volunteers distributed more than 200 water filter pitchers and replacement filters to immediately improve household drinking water safety.



## Agricultural Water Management

The Colorado Water Center continued to focus on **high-impact, community-responsive agricultural water research** on both sides of the Continental Divide, supporting practical pathways for ag producers to adapt resilient systems under times of increasing water uncertainty.

On Colorado's northeastern plains, activities focused on maximizing yield and economic benefit of **black-eyed pea production** with consideration for weed control and evaporative losses across both irrigated and dryland production methods. The Center also held a **salinity-related educational field day** with producers and stakeholders in the **South Platte River Basin** to demonstrate salinity-impacted agricultural areas, learn about ongoing research, and gain perspective on management strategies going forward.

On the Western Slope, research and programming connected **agri-technology, irrigation science, and forage crop system resilience** to real-world water management decisions in the Upper Colorado River Basin. This included remote-sensing technology applications to better measure evaporative losses and conserved consumptive water use under voluntary irrigation reductions to better inform conservation program design, water accounting, and policy discussions across Colorado and the Basin. Advancements also included development of cost-effective 3-D printed irrigation flumes and research on alternative, low water use forage and crop systems.



# Expanding Our Impact

## *Water Engagement & Research Across Colorado*

### **The USGS 104B Graduate Research Grants Program**

In 2025, funds provided by the U.S. Geological Survey through the 104B State Grants program were used to invest in Colorado's future water workforce. Funding supported graduate student research and education at universities across the state, while addressing critical water issues in Colorado. Projects included:

- Innovative Extreme Conditions Generation for METRIC Application Using UAS Imagery: Enhancing Evapotranspiration Estimation in Diverse Environments
- Reconstructing the Natural Streamflow of the Headwaters State
- Understanding Historic and Future Groundwater Use for Irrigation in Colorado: A Data-driven Analysis of Weather, Economic, and Policy Influences
- Large Wood Subsidies to Floodplain Soils
- Addressing Water Scarcity Through Optical Sensing for Water Reuse
- Deep Learning-Driven C-Band Snowmelt Mapping: Advancing Sustainable Water Management for Agricultural, Municipal, and Environmental Resilience in Colorado
- Improving Regression-Based Streamflow Forecasting in the Upper Colorado River Basin Using Machine Learning Clustering

### **Colorado Water Conservation Board Seed Grant Program**

The Colorado Water Center administers the Colorado Water Conservation Board's Research Seed Grant program to support implementation of the Colorado Water Plan. In 2025, funding was directed to address a wide range of water management challenges including:

- Examination of Price Elasticity of Residential Water in Colorado
- Enhancing Colorado's Instream Flow Program: A Comparative Analysis of State Methodologies, Hydrological Techniques, and Policy Innovations
- Comparing Methods to Quantify Instream Flows to Riparian Groundwater-Dependent Ecosystems in Mountain Valleys
- Nature-Based Solutions for Optimizing Freshening Flow Rates in Small Ponds and Reservoirs

### **The CSU Water Research, Education, and Extension Seed Grant Program**

In 2025, the Colorado Water Center provided funding for four projects integrating research, outreach, and educational activities to create actionable information and tools to improve water management practices. Projects included:

- Sustainable Water Management for Rangeland Resilience in the Western Great Plains
- Understanding Profit and Efficiency Relationships Through Farm Management Competitions
- Identifying Effective Strategies for Promoting Private Well Stewardship in Colorado
- Quantifying Trade-Offs Among Ecosystem Services Provided by Urban Ponds: Improvements to Water Quality, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, and Human Recreation



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**Learn More and Stay Connected:**

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