



# FY 2026-27 Budget Briefing Summary

## Natural Resources (Executive Director's Office, Parks and Wildlife, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Water Resources, Forestry)

The Department of Natural Resources is responsible for developing, protecting, and enhancing Colorado's natural resources for the use and enjoyment of present and future residents and visitors. The Department's FY 2025-26 appropriation represents approximately 0.3 percent of statewide General Fund appropriations.

The divisions included in this document are the Executive Director's Office, Division of Parks and Wildlife, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Division of Water Resources, and Division of Forestry.

## Summary of Request

### Department of Natural Resources

Item	Total Funds	General Fund	Cash Funds	Reapprop. Funds	Federal Funds	FTE
FY 2025-26 Appropriation						
SB 25-206 (Long Bill)	\$476,725,197	\$57,345,170	\$367,162,434	\$9,587,533	\$42,630,060	1,804.9
Other legislation	58,988,878	-264,268	59,253,146	0	0	2.5
Total	\$535,714,075	\$57,080,902	\$426,415,580	\$9,587,533	\$42,630,060	1,807.4
FY 2026-27 Requested Appropriation						
FY 2025-26 Appropriation	\$535,714,075	\$57,080,902	\$426,415,580	\$9,587,533	\$42,630,060	1,807.4
R1 New state parks [1]	2,191,310	0	2,191,310	0	0	7.4
R2 CWCB Water plan grant program [1]	273,127	0	273,127	0	0	1.7
R3 Assistance for livestock producers [1]	513,214	0	513,214	0	0	5.0
R4 SLB enhance lease compliance	633,648	0	633,648	0	0	3.7
R5 Enhance tribal consultation	141,082	0	141,082	0	0	0.9
R6 Mine safety support	154,713	0	154,713	0	0	0.9
R7 Technical updates to CWCB [1]	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Impacts driven by other agencies	-260,408	-53,252	-304,491	102,396	-5,061	1.0
Employee compensation common policies	12,080,708	1,994,929	8,892,874	1,119,916	72,989	0.0
Operating common policies	1,559,293	956,953	710,587	-230,110	121,863	0.0
Prior year actions	-51,817,620	246,652	-52,064,954	682	0	12.7
Total	\$501,183,142	\$60,226,184	\$387,556,690	\$10,580,417	\$42,819,851	1,840.7

Item	Total Funds	General Fund	Cash Funds	Reapprop. Funds	Federal Funds	FTE
Increase/-Decrease	-\$34,530,933	\$3,145,282	-\$38,858,890	\$992,884	\$189,791	33.3
Percentage Change	-6.4%	5.5%	-9.1%	10.4%	0.4%	1.8%

[1] Items addressed in this document. Other requests were addressed in separate staff briefings.

Changes are ongoing unless otherwise noted.

**R1 New state parks:** The Department asks for staff, vehicles, operational funding, resource stewardship funds to develop and manage two new recreation areas – the Pikes Peak and North Sand Hills Recreation Areas.

Year 1: The total cost is \$2.2 million and 7.4 FTE from the Parks Cash Fund.

Year 2: The cost increases to \$2.6 million and 11.7 FTE in order to bring additional staff onboard as the recreation areas expand.

Year 3: The cost increases to \$2.6 million and 14.8 FTE in order to continue bringing on additional staff as the recreation areas continue to expand. Funds for resource stewardship significantly decrease in Year 3, which is why the total cost remains consistent.

Increased revenue from the Keep Colorado Wild Pass to the Parks Cash Fund continues to fund requests for additional state park operations. The Department has already engaged with stakeholders near both recreation areas for the development and management of the area. The request breaks down as follows.

Pikes Peak Recreation Area (\$1.2 million and 3.7 FTE):

- Staff including a park technician, ranger, operations manager, and park manager (\$545,767 and 3.7 FTE)
- Vehicles (\$38,870)
- Operating expenses (\$225,000)
- Resource stewardship including habitat vegetation mapping, rare plant evaluation, breeding bird surveys, herptile surveys, and small mammal surveys (\$412,500)

North Sand Hills Recreation Area (\$969,173 and 3.7 FTE):

- Staff including a park technician, ranger, operations manager, and park manager (\$480,088 and 3.7 FTE)
- Vehicles (\$38,085)
- Operating expenses (\$120,000)
- Temporary staff (\$144,000)
- Resource stewardship including a cultural survey, geological survey, and funds for a seasonal biologist (\$187,000)

**R2 CWCB Water plan grant program:** The Department asks for additional staff to manage workload for the Water Plan Grant Program as a result of additional sports betting revenue from Proposition DD, JJ, and H.B. 25-1311 (Deductions for Net Sports Betting Proceeds).

Year 1: The total cost is \$273,127 and 1.7 FTE from the Water Plan Implementation Cash Fund.

Year 2: The total cost increases to \$853,928 and 6.1 FTE. This includes \$681,293 from the Water Plan Implementation Cash Fund and \$172,635 reappropriated funds.

The program supports grants for water storage and supply, water sharing agreements, conservation and land use planning, and watershed health and recreation. Since the program started, it has issued over 530 grants and \$110 million in local projects.

Sports betting revenue is the only ongoing fund source for the Water Plan Grant Program. This revenue has increased steadily, from \$7.9 million in FY 22-23 to \$28.2 million in FY 25-26 and a projected \$50.2 million by FY 28-29. To accommodate the growing grant program, the Department would like to hire:

- Two regional grant managers beginning in FY 2026-27
- Two accountants and two contract administrators beginning in FY 2027-28

**R3 Assistance for livestock producers:** The Department asks for contracts for range rider services, vehicles, and a technical FTE adjustment to support wolf conflict minimization.

Current year: The total cost is \$125,000 to allow for immediate deployment of additional range rider services beginning in April 2026.

Year 1: The total cost is \$513,214 and 5.0 FTE from the Wildlife Cash Fund.

The division currently has an annual budget of \$500,000 for ranger riders, which funds an average of 10 riders. An additional \$500,000 is projected to double the division's range riding capacity. The Department of Agriculture also has two permanent range riders. The Department prefers contracts to full-time staff, since range riding services are seasonal. The 5.0 FTE adjustment is for conflict and damage specialists that the Department has already hired without additional funds.

The Department indicates that the request will be paid for with non-license revenue from the Wildlife Cash Fund, and anticipates that Born to be Wild license plate revenue will be sufficient to fund the request (\$872,000 received in FY 2024-25). Two additional potential sources of revenue are the Keep Colorado Wild Pass (\$2.6 million in FY 2024-25) and lottery proceeds (none expected for FY 2025-26).

**R7 Technical updates to CWCB:** The Department asks for a budget-neutral change to remove Long Bill references to outdated program names and to align the structure with current Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) operations.

Year 1: The total cost is \$0.

The request would like to move two line items from the "Special Purpose" section to the "Administration" section of the CWCB Long Bill.

**Impacts driven by other agencies:** The request includes a net decrease of \$260,408 for requests from other state agencies. These are also called "non-prioritized requests." The amount shown in the table below applies only to this department and does not necessarily reflect the total value of the request.

#### Impacts driven by other agencies

Item	Total Funds	General Fund	Cash Funds	Reapprop. Funds	Federal Funds	FTE
NP IT accessibility	\$170,762	\$9,909	\$28,124	\$132,729	\$0	0.9
NP State accounting system (CORE) staff	71,842	8,663	59,868	1,989	1,322	0.0
NP SB24-205 AI compliance	56,461	18,424	34,623	2,851	563	0.1
NP Statewide enable AI	22,759	3,671	17,375	1,430	283	0.0
NP IT operating offset	-452,405	-72,977	-345,370	-28,441	-5,617	0.0
NP IT efficiencies	-129,827	-20,942	-99,111	-8,162	-1,612	0.0

Item	Total Funds	General Fund	Cash Funds	Reapprop. Funds	Federal Funds	FTE
Total	-\$260,408	-\$53,252	-\$304,491	\$102,396	-\$5,061	1.0

**Employee compensation common policies:** The request includes a net increase of \$12.1 million for employee compensation common policies. A common policy refers to general policies applied consistently to all departments.

#### Employee compensation common policies

Item	Total Funds	General Fund	Cash Funds	Reapprop. Funds	Federal Funds	FTE
Salary survey	\$6,200,624	\$870,827	\$5,020,011	\$212,375	\$97,411	0.0
Health, life, and dental	4,429,245	777,811	2,845,947	803,695	1,792	0.0
Unfunded liability amortization payments	799,360	218,046	545,219	64,827	-28,732	0.0
Step plan	532,775	97,721	403,439	27,603	4,012	0.0
PERA direct distribution	80,010	19,186	52,779	8,045	0	0.0
Paid family and medical leave insurance	35,970	9,812	24,534	2,917	-1,293	0.0
Short-term disability	3,511	1,526	1,732	454	-201	0.0
Shift differential	-787	0	-787	0	0	0.0
Total	\$12,080,708	\$1,994,929	\$8,892,874	\$1,119,916	\$72,989	0.0

**Operating common policies:** The request includes a net increase of \$1.6 million for operating common policies.

#### Operating common policies

Item	Total Funds	General Fund	Cash Funds	Reapprop. Funds	Federal Funds	FTE
Office of Information Technology services	\$1,664,132	\$104,537	\$834,199	\$722,486	\$2,910	0.0
Statewide indirect cost adjustment	982,771	990,730	795,586	-990,730	187,185	0.0
Depreciation-lease equivalent payments	727,155	583,243	143,912	0	0	0.0
State accounting system (CORE)	487,196	38,444	420,305	12,648	15,799	0.0
Workers' compensation	402,653	-789	406,944	-2,147	-1,355	0.0
Legal services	213,534	-156,067	363,086	42,942	-36,427	0.0
Leased space	62,241	8,970	53,064	53	154	0.0
Risk management & property	-1,497,847	-55,606	-1,429,403	-7,488	-5,350	0.0
Vehicle lease payments	-1,345,742	-539,939	-775,420	0	-30,383	0.0
Digital trunked radios	-84,559	0	-84,559	0	0	0.0
Capitol Complex leased space	-52,241	-16,570	-17,127	-7,874	-10,670	0.0
Total	\$1,559,293	\$956,953	\$710,587	-\$230,110	\$121,863	0.0

**Prior year actions:** The request includes a net decrease of \$51.8 million for the impact of prior year budget decisions and legislation.

#### Prior year actions

Item	Total Funds	General Fund	Cash Funds	Reapprop. Funds	Federal Funds	FTE
Annualize CPW RFI	\$5,840,694	\$0	\$5,840,694	\$0	\$0	0.0
SB 25-168 Prevent wildlife trafficking	1,551,816	0	1,551,816	0	0	9.0
SB 24-171 Wolverine restoration	283,408	0	283,408	0	0	-0.4
SB 25B-005 Reallocate DNR wolf funding	264,268	264,268	0	0	0	0.0
FY 25-26 R5 Implement IT product owners	10,720	0	5,360	5,360	0	0.2
FY 22-23 R10 Records access management system	9,750	0	9,750	0	0	0.0

Item	Total Funds	General Fund	Cash Funds	Reapprop. Funds	Federal Funds	FTE
FY 25-26 R7 Water plan technical update	3,225	0	3,225	0	0	0.1
HB 25-1115 Water supply measurement	1,894	0	1,894	0	0	0.1
HB 23-1242 Water conservation in oil and gas	166	0	166	0	0	0.0
FY 25-26 Step Plan	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
SB 25-183 CWCB Projects Bill	-53,978,788	0	-53,978,788	0	0	0.0
SB 24-199 Annual SCTF Projects Bill	-5,000,000	0	-5,000,000	0	0	0.0
HB 25-1332 State trust lands	-290,997	0	-290,997	0	0	-0.6
FY 25-26 R8 Wildlife conservation resources	-240,432	0	-240,432	0	0	0.9
SB 25-040 Future of sev taxes	-168,874	0	-168,874	0	0	0.0
SB 25-053 Protect wild bison	-50,000	0	-50,000	0	0	0.0
FY 25-26 R1 Keep Colorado Wild staff	-17,264	0	-17,264	0	0	2.8
FY 23-24 R15 Vehicles for water admin	-16,645	-16,645	0	0	0	0.0
FY 25-26 R9 SLB working lands intern prog	-13,234	0	-13,234	0	0	0.0
FY 25-26 R4 Dept admin support	-4,678	0	0	-4,678	0	0.5
FY 25-26 Salary survey	-2,631	-971	-1,660	0	0	0.0
FY 25-26 R2 Outdoor Equity Grant Program	-18	0	-18	0	0	0.1
Total	-\$51,817,620	\$246,652	-\$52,064,954	\$682	\$0	12.7

## Issues Presented

This is a summary of the briefing issues presented to the Joint Budget Committee by their dedicated non-partisan staff.

**Budget Reduction Options:** The Executive Budget Request includes no General Fund reductions for the divisions in this briefing. However, staff has identified potential budget reduction options totaling \$8.5 million, or 14.8 percent of the current General Fund appropriations in this section of the budget.<sup>1</sup> This issue brief reviews these proposals.

**Wolf Depredation and Conflict Minimization:** Last year, the Joint Budget Committee initiated two Requests for Information (RFI)'s related to wolves. This issue brief includes the Department's responses and provides a brief overview of wolf depredation events, resources, costs, and the Department's wolf-livestock conflict prevention efforts.

## For More Information

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<sup>1</sup> Current FY 2025-26 appropriations do not include mid-year reductions in executive orders.