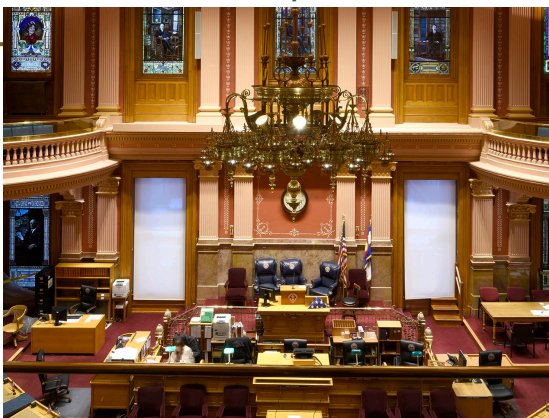


Final Report to the General Assembly

Water Resources and Agriculture Review Committee
December 2025 | Research Publication 835



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December 2025

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December 2025

To Members of the Seventy-fifth General Assembly:

Submitted herewith is the final report of the Water Resources and Agriculture Review Committee. This committee was created pursuant to Article 98 of Title 37, Colorado Revised Statutes. The purpose of this committee is to oversee the conservation, use, development, and financing of Colorado's water resources and to identify, monitor, and address Colorado agriculture issues.

At its meeting on November 15, 2025 the Legislative Council reviewed the report of this committee. A motion to forward this report and the bills therein for consideration in the 2026 session was approved.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sen. James Coleman
Chair

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This report is also available online at:

<https://leg.colorado.gov/committees/water-resources-and-agriculture-review-committee/2025-regular-session>

Committee Charge

Pursuant to Section 37-98-102, C.R.S., the Water Resources and Agriculture Review Committee's (WRARC) purpose is to oversee the conservation, use, development, and financing of Colorado's water resources and identify, monitor, and address Colorado agriculture issues. The committee is also required to review statewide planning for water resources. The WRARC reviews and proposes legislation to further its purpose. In conducting its review, the WRARC consults with experts in the fields of water conservation, quality, use, finance, and development and the field of agriculture. While the committee is considered a year-round committee, it follows interim committee guidelines for drafting and requesting legislation.

Committee Activities

The committee held four meetings during the 2025 interim and attended two field trips. Briefings and presentations were made by American Whitewater; Behavioral Health Administration; Colorado Agrivoltaics Learning Center; Colorado Assessor's Association; Colorado Attorney General's Office; Colorado Backcountry Hunters & Anglers; Colorado Cattlemen's Association; Colorado Department of Agriculture; Colorado Department of Local Affairs; Colorado Department of Natural Resources; Colorado Farm Bureau; Colorado Farmers Market Association; Colorado Legislative Strategies; Colorado River District; Colorado Solar and Storage Association; Colorado State University; Colorado Water Conservation Board; Colorado Wool Growers Association; Dominion Water; Garfield County; Great Outdoors Colorado; Ground Up Consulting; Jewell Jimmerson Natural Resources Law; Las Animas County; Lower South Platte Water Conservancy District; Nature Conservancy; Pitkin County; farmers and ranchers; Rocky Mountain Farmers Union; Spencer Fane, LLP Denver; Trout Unlimited; United Wolf Coalition; Upper Colorado River Commission; Western Resources Advocates; Western States Ranches; and members of the public on a wide range of subjects, including:

- ranch property taxes;
- environmental stewardship;
- gray wolf reintroduction in Colorado;
- mental health in the agriculture industry;
- recreational water usage;
- issues with the Colorado River;
- the Perkins Canal project;
- agrivoltaics and solar projects; and
- Zebra Mussels in Colorado.

The following sections discuss the committee's activities during the 2025 interim.

AI Use in Pesticide Application

A representative of Fagerberg Farms discussed artificial intelligence (AI) tools they use on their farm, including a pesticide sprayer and laser weeder that use AI algorithms and machine learning to differentiate crops from weeds and reduce pesticide use. He discussed the costs of these investments, the return on investment, and the types of crops that can benefit from AI use.

Agriculture Mental Health

The committee heard from the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA), Agricultural Behavioral Health Work Group, Behavioral Health Administration, and the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union about mental health in the agricultural community. CDA discussed the department's efforts concerning mental health resources for agricultural producers. Panelists also discussed the Agricultural Behavioral Health Work Group, the various provisions of [Senate Bill 24-055](#), and the Land Logic training program for rural behavioral health care providers.

Agrivoltaics and Solar Projects

The Colorado Agrivoltaics Learning Center (CALC) and the Colorado Solar and Storage Association (COSSA) presented to the committee on agrivoltaics and solar projects in Colorado. CALC discussed the stressors impacting the amount of farm land in Colorado and the potential to preserve farm land through the use of photovoltaics on agricultural lands. Panelists discussed the benefits of agrivoltaics, including water conservation, higher crop yields, improved habitat, and economic opportunities. The committee also heard about solar farm impacts on plants and animals, recent legislation incentivizing agrivoltaic usage, and potential new legislation. Presenters from COSSA discussed the current state of solar projects in Colorado, future expansion of those projects, and how they might impact Colorado farmlands.

AgWell Funding

A representative from the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union discussed how the AgWell program is designed to prevent mental health crisis in the agricultural community by referring individuals to professional services. These services include but are not limited to, suicide prevention, substance abuse services, general mental health resources, and financial resources. The program is sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, and supported by grants from the Western Regional Agricultural Stress Assistance Program and the Colorado Trust. The panelist also told the committee about the federal funding freeze and internal efforts to raise funds needed to continue the programs they offer.

Colorado Farmers' Market Association

The committee heard presentations concerning the concept of incorporating the Colorado Farmer's Market Association (CFMA) into the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA). Representatives from CFMA and CDA presented to the committee on the work of the CFMA and the concept of state funding used to support the association. Presenters addressed the complexities, details, and challenges involved in operating markets and direct consumer produce sales in Colorado. A discussion also addressed how the example of the New Mexico Farmer's Market Association receiving state funding might serve as a model.

Committee recommendations

As a result of committee discussion, the committee recommended Resolution A, which expresses support for Colorado's farmers markets and urges the Colorado Department of Agriculture and the Colorado Farmers Market Association to provide expertise and financial and other resources necessary to support farmers' market managers.

Colorado Outdoor Strategy

Presenters from DNR, the Nature Conservancy, Colorado Cattlemen's Association, and a Las Animas county commissioner presented on their involvement with [Colorado's Outdoor Strategy](#). Colorado's Outdoors Strategy was developed to provide data and tools to inform local decision making, and advance coordinated, statewide strategies and funding for conservation, outdoor recreation and climate resilience.

Colorado River

The committee received updates on the status of Colorado River negotiations. Upper Colorado River Commissioner Becky Mitchell provided an update on interstate negotiations surrounding expiring drought guidelines, goals for the state's water interests, reservoir conditions, downstream states' resistance to usage reductions, and upstream basin management efforts. State officials explained compact compliance measures, including shepherding practices, divisional management, measurement protocols, and stakeholder input processes. Presenters addressed questions about stakeholder meeting procedures and timelines, measurement regulations, compact administration, and impacts from previous river negotiations. Additional discussion occurred regarding operating guidelines for major reservoirs, effects of interstate water marketing, conservation needs, and recommendations for new initiatives. Ranching organization representatives described the river's uncertain future, agricultural consequences from potential water supply reductions, and proposed strategies to support the farming sector. Environmental advocates spoke about water pooling opportunities among rights holders, funding requirements, and incorporating river health into policy decisions.

Environmental Stewardship

The committee received a presentation on draft legislation concerning abandoned mine remediation in Colorado, including state and federal law that addresses legal liability from mine cleanup efforts. Discussion also addressed the good samaritan laws in the context of Colorado's needs and existing law. Presenters discussed the complexities of the legal landscape surrounding hardrock mine cleanup and its impact on water quality, changes in state and federal law, and future opportunities. A presentation from representatives from DNR outlined the state's perspective on the topic, including complexities with the federal Clean Water Act and Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, also known as the Superfund program.

Integrated Rocky Mountain-region Innovation Center for Healthy Soils (IN-RICHES) at Colorado State University

Ground Up Consulting and researchers from Colorado State University (CSU) provided an overview of the [IN-RICHES program](#) and CSU's role in the program. They discussed CSU's efforts to improve soil health and the Colorado Open Soil Moisture Monitoring Network.

Perkins Canal

The committee heard about efforts by the State of Nebraska to secure land in Eastern Colorado to build the Perkins Canal. The Colorado Attorney General and State Engineer provided an overview of the complaint filed by Nebraska to the United States Supreme Court in July, explaining obligations under the South Platte River Compact and the state's compliance status. The committee also learned about the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program between Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming. The committee heard about other legal perspectives and regional water rights administration from the Lower South Platte Water Conservancy District, and community concerns about landowners receiving correspondence from Nebraska regarding eminent domain to acquire property for canal construction. Finally, the committee discussed canal impacts on property values, the number of affected landowners, legal precedent for eminent domain or condemnation proceedings, and current well pumping volumes.

Precipitation Harvesting Pilot Project Report

The committee heard a presentation about a precipitation harvesting report statutorily required initially in [House Bill 09-1129](#), with deadlines revised in [House Bill 15-1016](#). Details were provided regarding the only pilot project approved by the state involving Sterling Ranch and Dominion Water and Sanitation District. The presentation covered water efficiency practices, a precipitation harvesting legislative timeline, and the interaction between state water law and the pilot project. Committee members and panelists discussed rainwater harvesting use restrictions and the implications for other water users in the state.

Ranch Property Taxes

The committee heard presentations on current statute and potential changes, concerning ranch property taxes. Representatives from the Department of Local Affairs and the Colorado Assessors Association presented to the committee on how agricultural land is composed and how property tax classifications are determined and administered. The presenters responded to questions from the committee about implementing a fee structure for agricultural property classifications and addressed which activities may or may not qualify as agricultural. Presenters commented on the potential implications of expanding the types of activities considered as agricultural for property tax purposes and examined other states' approaches to agricultural property classification. They also discussed agricultural activities currently excluded from property tax designation, including commercial chicken production, and highlighted the increasing costs of starting an agricultural operation.

Committee recommendations

As a result of committee discussion, the committee recommended [Bill A](#), which modifies the definitions of farms and ranches used to classify agricultural land for property tax purposes.

Stream Access

The committee heard several presentations on stream access during its meeting in August. Representatives from outdoor recreation organizations advocated for changes to state law allowing for increased recreational stream access in the state. They fielded questions about landowner conflicts, property compensation, stakeholder engagement, access variations, industry impacts, and law enforcement. A natural resources attorney reviewed existing case law on stream access, explaining enforcement inconsistencies stemming from legal ambiguity, while also discussing the legal aspects of the public trust doctrine and the state's water appropriation systems. Other presenters raised concerns about private property rights, trespassing laws, potential takings claims, aquatic invasive species risks, liability issues, and escalating landowner tensions from increased recreation. Further discussion addressed legal clarity, takings avoidance strategies, distinctions between floating rights and physical access to streambeds, and possible frameworks for stakeholder processes to pursue statutory changes.

Watershed Health and Forest Management

The committee heard presentations from DNR and the Colorado Water Conservation Board on forest and watershed management practices and the current state of forest health in Colorado. Panelists presented an analysis of statewide susceptibility to post-wildfire hazards and community wildfire ready action plans. They also presented to the committee on the Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program and the funding status of the Wildfire Ready Access Program. Additionally, the committee heard an overview of the Upper Catamount Reservoir and Michigan Ditch Projects, which are aimed at protecting watershed and forest health against wildfire risk.

Wolf Reintroduction and Management

The committee received updates on the state's wolf reintroduction program. Presentations discussed direct impacts to specific Western Slope communities, engagement with Colorado Parks and Wildlife employees, and effects on other wildlife. Presenters spoke about impacts to cattle ranchers that fall outside of the compensation structure. Concerns with non-lethal mitigation implementation and suggestions for improvements to depredation investigations were also shared with the committee. Discussion also covered producer recommendations for program improvements, factors affecting the depredation compensation fund, and personal experience in reporting a wolf depredation.

The committee also received presentations from representatives from Colorado Parks and Wildlife, who provided an overview of the reintroduction program, conflict minimization strategies, a financial update relating to the program, and information on the current wolf population status. The panelists responded to committee questions regarding deviations from the wolf management plan, program implementation, communications with impacted communities, cost of implementation, and key term definitions. Discussion among the committee and presenters also covered consideration of roadkill feeding, the Range Rider program, and the risk of sub-species integration.

Zebra Mussels

Representatives from DNR discussed the impacts of zebra mussels to infrastructure, recent detections on the Colorado River and in Eagle County, and increasing Colorado Parks and Wildlife's sampling capacity on the Western Slope. They also discussed ongoing monitoring in several aquatic resources along the Colorado River and campaigns to raise aquatic nuisance species awareness.

Other Policy Areas

The committee recommended [Bill B](#), which prohibits marketing agricultural products not grown in Colorado as grown in Colorado.

Additionally, the committee requested a [bill](#) to be drafted that would have limited the number of renewable energy projects supported by the Colorado Energy Office in rural areas; however, the bill was not ultimately recommended by the committee.

Summary of Recommendations

As a result of the committee's activities, the committee recommended two bills and one resolution to the Legislative Council for consideration in the 2026 session. At its meeting on November 15, 2025, the Legislative Council approved the two recommended bills and one resolution for introduction. The approved bills and resolution are described below.

Bill A - Agricultural Property Tax Definitions

The bill modifies the definitions of farms and ranches used to classify agricultural land for property tax purposes, and specifies ranches are for grazing livestock through pasture-based operations.

Bill B - Protections for Ag Products Grown in Colorado

The bill prohibits marketing agricultural products not grown in Colorado as grown in Colorado.

Resolution A - Support Farmers' Market Managers

The resolution expresses support for Colorado's farmers markets and urges the Colorado Department of Agriculture and the Colorado Farmers Market Association to provide expertise and financial and other resources necessary to support farmers' market managers.

Resource Materials

Meeting summaries are prepared for each meeting of the committee and contain all handouts provided to the committee. The summaries of meetings and attachments are available at the Division of Archives, 1313 Sherman Street, Denver (303-866-2055). The listing below contains the dates of committee meetings and the topics discussed at those meetings. Meeting summaries are also available on our website at:

<https://leg.colorado.gov/content/committees>

Meetings and Topics Discussed

June 3-4, 2025

- Southwest River Basin Tour

June 30, 2025

- Ranch Property Taxes
- Colorado Farmer's Market Association
- Environmental Good Samaritan Bill
- Precipitation Harvesting Pilot Project
- Wolf Reintroduction

August 19-21, 2025

- Colorado Water Congress Conference

August 20, 2025

- Colorado River
- Perkins Canal
- Stream Access in Colorado

September 15, 2025

- Agriculture Mental Health
- Watershed Health Forest Management
- Colorado Outdoor Strategy
- Healthy Soils
- Bill Draft Requests

October 29, 2025

- Perkins Canal
- Artificial Intelligence in Pesticide Application
- AgWell Funding
- Agrivoltaics and Solar Projects
- Zebra Mussels
- Bill Draft Approval