

Research Report Key Findings

1. **There is a high level of concern among Coloradans about the fragility of the environment, including having clean water, clean air, natural areas and wildlife.**

Conservation in the West Survey: A survey of the attitudes of voters in five Western States, 2011

- 71% of Coloradans consider these environmental qualities to be an aspect of life here that is fragile, a higher percentage than any of the Western states surveyed.
- When asked about the top two or three environmental issues that Coloradans are facing today, 31% of respondents named water pollution/clean water as one of the top issues, and 28% named air pollution. Water supplies and drought came in third at 20%. (Note: This was an unprompted, open-ended question.)

Public Opinions on Water Quality Issues, 2007

- Water and air pollution are the most important environmental issues to Coloradans. Thirty-four percent said water pollution was the most important environmental issue (as compared to 35% who responded air pollution), and 68% said water pollution was one of the two most important issues to them.

2. **There is evidence that many Coloradans understand that there is a water shortfall within the state.**

Conservation in the West Survey: A survey of the attitudes of voters in five Western States, 2011

- Inadequate water supply was ranked as an extremely or very serious issue by 46% of Colorado respondents. The only topics rated more important were the loss of family farms and ranches (49% said this was an extremely or very serious issue) and the state budget deficit (74% said this was an extremely or very serious issue).

Public Perceptions, Preferences and Values for Water in the West, 2008

- Nearly 50% of Coloradans believe that there is not enough water to meet the state's current needs in the short term, and more than 70% believe that there is not enough water to meet the state's needs in the long term. When compared to other Western states, a greater percentage of Coloradans think that there will be water scarcity in both the short and long term, indicating a greater awareness in our state about water shortage issues.

Colorado River Water Conservation District Survey, 2009

- A majority of district residents say the state is not in a drought today; however, looking ahead ten years, most find Colorado water lacking. Over half (55%) of voters say we are not in a drought today and nearly two-thirds (64%) believe Colorado has an adequate amount of water to meet current needs. Yet, when asked to contemplate future water needs, just 31% believe that there is an adequate supply of water in Colorado, while 57% say that there is an inadequate amount.
- However, the same survey found that issues other than water were at the forefront of regional concerns today. Just 37% in the Colorado River Water District describe “inadequate water supplies” as an extremely or very serious problem in the Western Slope. Concern about water supplies ranks well behind issues such as the economy (75%), loss of farmlands, ranches and orchards (55%) and taxes (46%).

3. One survey showed major variations by age, education level, partisan affiliation and district of the view that Colorado will lack enough water in the future.

Colorado River Water Conservation District Survey, 2009

- Seniors (67%), voters in the northern part of the district (65%), Democrats (65%) and college-educated respondents (62%) are most likely to say there will be an inadequate water supply in the next decade.
- With increased age comes a greater likelihood of saying that there will be an inadequate water supply in the next decade, including ages 18-34 (33%), ages 35-44 (59%), ages 45-54 (59%), ages 55-64 (65%) and ages 65+ (67%).
- With increased education comes a greater likelihood of saying that there will be an inadequate water supply in the next decade, including high school or less (47%), some college (55%) and college degree (62%).
- Democrats (65%) were the most likely to say there will be an inadequate water supply in the next decade, followed by Independents (62%) and Republicans (51%).
- Headwaters (66%) were more likely than downstream (43%) to say there will be an inadequate water supply in the next decade.

4. There is a low level of awareness among Coloradans regarding where their water comes from.

Public Opinions on Water Quality Issues, 2007

- Within focus groups, responses varied widely as participants tried to describe where their water comes from. Only a few residents out of all the groups could describe the full process of how they believe water reaches their homes, from snowmelt to tap. Front Range participants had the most difficulty explaining where their water comes from.
- More than one-third of Coloradans don't know where water run-off goes.

5. There is a low level of awareness among Coloradans regarding the varied uses of water within the state.

Colorado River Water Conservation District Survey, 2009

- Less than half in this area recognize that Colorado is obligated to meet certain water obligations to down river states. Forty-eight percent of residents are aware that a certain amount of water must flow to other states, while nearly one-in-five (19%) believe that the state can keep all water from the Colorado River. One-third (32%) do not know one way or the other.
- Survey respondents mistakenly believed that households and industry uses the most water, indicating that people are not well-informed about who actually uses the majority of water in the West (agriculture).

6. Coloradans recognize the importance of the state’s water resources to our economic prosperity and to them personally.

Conservation in the West Survey: A survey of the attitudes of voters in five Western States, 2011

- Voters in these five states attach a great deal of importance to having clean water, clean air, natural areas and wildlife as a fundamental ingredient in the good quality of life in their state (87% extremely or very important). Two-thirds of these Western voters view those things as an aspect of life that is fragile and needs to be cared for and protected (69%), rather than as an enduring feature that is unlikely to change (26%).
- This underlying sense of guarding a fragile yet important part of their lives appears to play a role in how Western voters respond to a range of environmental issues. Two-thirds believe the current laws protecting land, air and water should be strengthened, or at least better enforced (66% combined, 18% strengthened, 48% better enforced).

Colorado River Water Conservation District Survey, 2009

- Residents very much recognize the value of the Colorado River and its tributaries to the economy and them personally. Three-quarters (76%) of voters say that the phrase “important to the economy on the Western Slope” describes the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it very well. Similarly, seven-in-ten say that the river is “important to me personally” (69% describes the Colorado River and its tributaries very well).

Survey of Public Attitudes about Water Issues in Colorado, 2005

- Coloradans are very concerned with drinking water and overall water quality, but overall, water for personal use was deemed more important than water for environmental, agricultural, industrial or recreational use. Of the various water issues, Colorado survey respondents ranked clean drinking water, clean rivers and clean ground water as the most important issues. Water for recreation and landscaping came in last.

7. Despite current economic conditions, most residents are still willing to support government funding and additional fees to help protect and expand our water supply.
Conservation in the West Survey: A survey of the attitudes of voters in five Western States, 2011

- Voters surveyed in Colorado tend to reject the concept that the economy and the environment are in conflict with one another. They overwhelmingly believe that “we can protect land and water and have a strong economy with good jobs at the same time, without having to choose one over the other” (77%). One-in-five (20%) agree more with the statement that “sometimes protections for land and water and a strong economy are in conflict and we must choose one over the other.”
- One of the most resounding affirmative responses in the survey is agreement that “even with state budget problems, we should still find the money to protect Colorado’s land, water and wildlife.” Eighty-seven percent of Colorado voters agree with this view.

Public Opinions on Water Quality Issues, 2007

- Most Coloradans support government funding for water pollution controls and river cleanup. People were more likely to support funding for K-12 education over water issues, but they support funding for water issues over air pollution and highways/streets.

Public Perceptions, Preferences and Values for Water in the West, 2008

- In order to pay for capital investments, respondents target increased fees for the heaviest water users and increased fees for new development. Respondents are not averse to limiting growth and joining water and land use planning in order to address long-term scarcity.
- A majority of respondents are willing to pay additional fees on their watering bill to fund water related programs. The most popular programs that people were willing to fund include constructing reservoirs for storage, keeping irrigated farms in production and creating a reuse water system for public landscapes. The least popular programs include increasing household water efficiency by subsidizing efficient water appliances, making water infrastructure improvements in rural communities to compensate for water being transferred from farms to cities and setting aside water for public-based recreation.

- 8. Many Coloradans are unfamiliar with basic water terms – indicating a need to communicate water issues using language more understandable to the average Coloradan.**

Public Perceptions, Preferences and Values for Water in the West, 2008

- Most Colorado respondents were not familiar with basic water terms, such as Water Reuse, Consumptive Use and Surface Water.

- 9. The majority of water education efforts in the state have not focused on the appreciation and value of water.**

Colorado Water Education Task Force: 2008 Water Education Survey & Focus Group Report, 2008

- When asked about the main purpose of their water education efforts, only 2.7% responded the “appreciation and value of water.” Top responses were conservation (20%), information (17.3%), and environmental science (13.3%).

- 10. Americans value water over any other service they receive, and industrial/agricultural businesses rank it second.**

ITT Value of Water Survey: Americans on the U.S. Water Crisis, 2010

- 95% of American voters value water over any other service they receive, including heat, electricity, Internet, cell phone, land line phone, cable TV and cooling systems.
- Our nation’s industrial and agricultural businesses – among the heaviest water users – rank water second, only after electricity.
- About three out of four American voters and industrial/agricultural businesses say disruptions in the water system would have direct and personal consequences.

Survey and Poll Citations

1. Conservation in the West Survey: A survey of the attitudes of voters in five Western States
Methodology: Random telephone interviews
Sample size: 600 Coloradans
Date: Jan. 2011
Sponsor: Colorado College State of the Rockies Project
2. Public Perceptions, Preferences and Values for Water in the West
Methodology: Three focus groups, email survey to 203,750 randomly selected households in Western US
Sample size: 535 Coloradans
Date: 2008
Sponsor: Colorado State University, Colorado Water Congress
3. Colorado River Water Conservation District Survey
Methodology: Random telephone interviews
Sample size: 500 registered voters in the 15-county Colorado River District
Date: May, June 2009
Sponsor: Colorado River District
4. Public Opinions on Water Quality Issues
Methodology: Random telephone interviews
Sample size: 1,929 Coloradans, approximately 284 surveys by residents in each of five geographic locations in the state
Date: 2007
Sponsor: Water Quality Control Division, CDPHE
5. Survey of Public Attitudes about Water Issues in Colorado
Methodology: Direct Mail to random residences in N. and S. Dakota, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming and Utah
Sample size: 309 Coloradans completed the survey
Date: November 2004
Sponsor: Colorado State University

6. Colorado Water Education Task Force: 2008 Water Education Survey & Focus Group Report

Methodology: Quantitative online survey

Sample size: Unknown

Date: 2008

Sponsor: Colorado Water Conservation Board, in partnership with the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education and the Colorado Watershed Network

7. ITT Value of Water Survey: Americans on the U.S. Water Crisis

Methodology: National telephone survey

Sample size: 1,003 American voters

Date: August, September 2010

Sponsor: ITT