

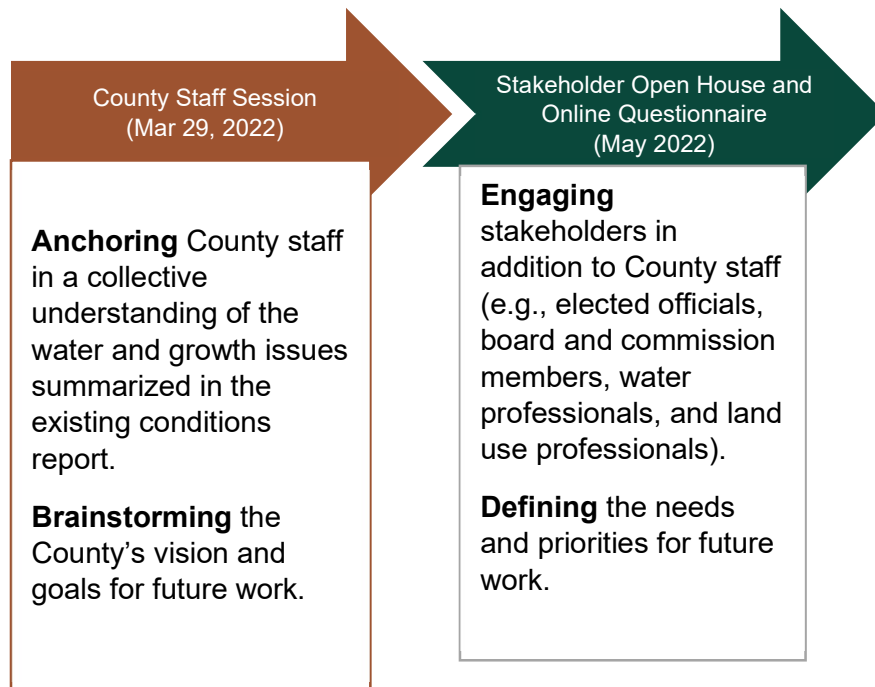


Memorandum

To: Lesli Ellis, Daylan Figgs, Eric Tracy (Larimer County)
From: Amy Volckens and Shelby Sommer (Brendle Group)
Date: June 2, 2022
Re: Task 2 Summary: Initial Vision and Goal-Setting Activities

Background

In 2021, the County initiated a Regional Water Existing Conditions project to assess existing regional water conditions and perform initial visioning and goal-setting activities to guide future work. Initial vision and goal-setting concepts were gathered through two facilitated work sessions with County staff and external stakeholders:



This Task 2 memorandum is the final deliverable associated with the Water Planning Foundational Work project. This memorandum will serve as a starting point for future work that

the County undertakes related to regional water planning and collaboration efforts, recognizing that future work will involve additional stakeholder engagement.

Regional Existing Conditions Analysis Input

The [regional existing conditions report](#) focused on water supplies and agricultural land. Most review comments were addressed through report revisions. Additional comments on the report include:

- It is important to see the entire region summarized in one place. More detail would be good too.
- It is important to note that water use in Larimer County includes the 4+ million annual visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park.

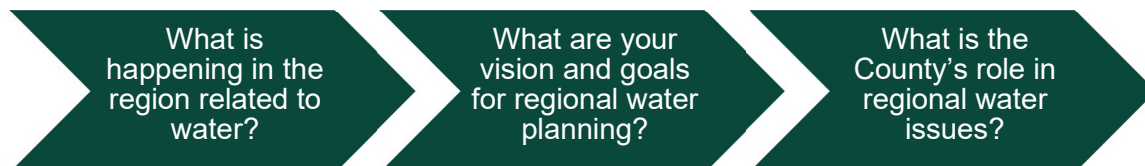
Stakeholder input on future regional existing conditions work led by Larimer County included the following suggestions:

- A thorough assessment of water service providers for water waste ordinances, water shortage action plans, and past water use restrictions.
- A thorough assessment of system development and billing charges, as well as comparison of fees and charges across providers for example development types.
- Discuss local permitting requirements (e.g., for Larimer County, Fort Collins) and how those affect and potentially encumber regional water projects.
- Expand scope to include environmental and recreational flows, wastewater, water quality, drought, wildfire, reduced water rentals to the agricultural sector, stormwater, and cross-media connections (e.g., air, soils).
- Further analyze the risks and effects if the Colorado-Big Thompson system were to fail or be curtailed.
- Conduct a more extensive analysis of raw water providers (i.e., reservoir, irrigation, and ditch companies) and water associations. For example, the Water Association of the Rockies appears to be missing from the report.



Initial Vision and Goal-Setting Input

County staff and external stakeholders were asked a series of questions:



The following sections summarize the range of input received from County staff and external stakeholders. Future work will focus on evaluating and prioritizing the input. A complete copy of the input received is attached to this memorandum.

WHO IS INTERESTED IN REGIONAL WATER?

In addition to the County's efforts, regional water conversations are being conducted by several entities:

1. The South Platte Basin Roundtable focuses on identifying projects and processes to close the gap between projected water supplies and demands. Larimer County participates on the Roundtable.
2. The Community Foundation of Northern Colorado has convened Regional StratOp conversations that include Larimer and Weld Counties, communities, and water service providers. Larimer County attended a May 16, 2022, meeting.
3. The City of Fort Collins has been studying water-related matters that arise from having multiple water service providers that serve the Fort Collins Growth Management Area, and the solutions available to help.
4. The Larimer County Agricultural Advisory Board and Open Lands Advisory Board are working to bridge agricultural-municipal water use and promote water-sharing pilots.
5. The "Poudre Runs Through It" group fosters regional conversations. Open Water Foundation is a member organization that maintains a [public website](#) for the Poudre watershed.

WHAT ARE THE KEY WATER AND LAND USE ISSUES IN THE REGION?

1. Water is a finite resource.
2. Long-range water sustainability for the region needs to be defined.
3. Healthy watersheds and rivers are of interest and important in the region.
4. Water supply requirements (volumes and costs) vary by water service provider for new developments.
5. Adequate water supplies are a key consideration that should be considered when evaluating development and planned growth.
6. Recreation and tourism economies rely on water and healthy watersheds and rivers.
7. Productive agriculture lands require water supplies.
8. Water exports to the Denver Metro region affect the Northern Colorado region.
9. Housing affordability has a nexus with water supply requirements and tap fee costs.
10. Understanding the needs of, and impacts to, under-served and disproportionately impacted communities is a regional water issue.



WHAT WATER-RELATED EFFORTS COULD BE ADVANCED THROUGH REGIONAL COOPERATION?

- Preserving environmental and recreational flows.
- Water sharing to fight wildfires.
- Keeping water in Northern Colorado.
- Water conservation – using less water, using water more efficiently.
- Educating people about water topics such as available conservation measures, alternative water supplies, and current water supply conditions.
- Identifying alternative water supplies.
- Increasing raw water storage. Water providers and the agricultural sector agree on the need to maximize yield of existing water rights and store water for drought and

emergency purposes. However, specific entities object to specific storage projects. All would like to see smaller-scale project support be less regulatory/more collaborative.

- Linking water solutions and the value of local food sources.
- Mitigating water supply risks from a Colorado River Compact call.
- Designing water infrastructure for future climate conditions.
- Planning for water sharing and banking.
- Normalizing water-wise landscaping choices through demonstration plots and landscape and irrigation standards.

WHAT IS (AND SHOULD BE) THE COUNTY'S ROLE IN REGIONAL WATER ISSUES?

- **Overarching:**
 - Larimer County is not a water service provider but aims to understand the issues and how best to make decisions relative to water and that support communities and collaborate in the region.
 - Stakeholders recommended Larimer County look for best practices in other Counties (i.e., Arapahoe, Douglas, El Paso) that are engaging in regional water issues.
- **Lead the way by displaying water-wise principles at County facilities:**
 - The County is including demonstration landscapes and teaching areas with irrigation information at The Ranch opening in 2022.
 - The County is developing an internal sustainability plan that can be an avenue for the County to “lead the way” on water matters in County facilities and operations, including exploring greywater use.
- **Long range planning:**
 - Stop basing planning decisions on demographic projections. Rather, decide what kind of a community/county you want, identify the natural resource constraints, and plan accordingly.
 - The comprehensive plan and a long-range water element could help bolster the County's planning efforts for water, wastewater, and environmental flows. If water districts shared information, that could aid in regional comprehensive planning.
 - Watershed planning and stormwater planning are already well covered by existing or developing plans. It is very important for Larimer County to be involved in ongoing efforts related to the Boxelder Stormwater Authority.
 - Explore and promote alternative water sources where feasible.
- **Emergency operations:**
 - Larimer County has a critical role in emergency operations. The County can use and potentially maintain regional water information to help during emergencies.
 - During future emergencies (e.g., fires/droughts), self-supplied users may be cut off from water supplies and look to the County for support/assistance.
- **Data and information management:**
 - Provide data aggregation and clearinghouse services.
 - Create and maintain a shared database across departments for the County's water portfolio.
 - Share and maintain a database of water providers and water sources for firefighting for emergency management purposes.
 - Update and maintain ditch company changes-of-use.
 - Support open data and data-driven and science-driven decisions.
- **Public education and engagement:**
 - Share information about the new statewide landscape transformation program.
 - Share information about funding opportunities.

- Promote and help extend the reach of conservation programs offered by water service providers and Northern Water.
- Host a website or links to references for drought tolerant planting.
- **Regional convening:**
 - Continue regional water conversations, like the public open house. Convene proactive planning, communication, and coordination among water service providers, land use authorities, boards and commissions, developers, and other agencies to enable more cooperation and mitigate future service issues.
 - Pursue and aggregate regional funding.
 - Lean on water providers for water subject matter expertise.
 - Continue participating in the South Platte Basin Roundtable.
 - Promote instream flow rights.
 - Promote water sharing and banking and alternative transfer mechanisms (ATMs).
 - Promote climate smart agriculture.
- **Fees and revenues to fund incentives and programs:**
 - Develop water efficiency programs (or incentives).
 - Conservation incentives.
 - Programs/incentives to retrofit non-functional turf.
- **Regulations:**
 - **Land use & zoning:**
 - Manage sprawl. Encourage denser developments in urban areas for water use efficiency.
 - Align water system infrastructure with planned development densities and types.
 - Be a leader in open space and sustainable agriculture.
 - **Development reviews:**
 - Understand and incorporate the impact water has on the development of the County in both rural and urban areas.
 - Work with municipalities to update and make consistent water supply requirements (if possible).
 - Consider whether meters can be downsized, which then reduces tap fees, assists with housing affordability, and improves water supply reliability.
 - Work with the State of Colorado on water supply adequacy requirements – don't do something new or separate.
 - Ease 1041 regulations on water providers.
 - **Building and plumbing codes; land use codes; and development standards:**
 - Establish minimum flows for fire sprinklers.
 - Promote alternatives to water-intensive development and uses.
 - Establish landscape standards and recommended plant lists.
 - Regulate sod installation and/or establish a maximum lawn size.
 - Require low-flow fixtures
 - Require or incentivize reuse systems in the home (e.g., shower water treated for toilet water)
 - Encourage minimal landscaping.
 - **Floodplain regulations**
 - **Stream and wetland protection standards**

- **Legislative advocacy**

WHAT QUESTIONS REMAIN TO BE ANSWERED?

- What is the stance of the County on authorizing wells? Is the County relying on the state to adequately appropriate (and not over-appropriate) wells in the non-tributary aquifers?
- Native waters are leaving the area to go to the Denver Metro area. Should the entities that do land planning work on methods/projects to keep the native water for the local growth?
- How many water providers are willingly to work with the County on regional water matters? The answer depends on organizational interest as well as staff capacity to do so.
- How can regional water issues be advanced and buffered from turnover in boards and councils? As water use changes from agricultural to municipal use, fewer people may be interested to serve on boards, resulting in a loss of institutional knowledge.
- Is it feasible/helpful to consolidate water service providers?
- Can wildlife be added as a beneficial use to all storage reservoirs in Larimer County?

Attachments

- Attachment A: County Staff Work Session Summary (notes, presentation, jamboards)
- Attachment B: Stakeholder Open House materials (poster boards, survey results, compiled input)