



# WATER CONSERVATION AND THE GREEN INDUSTRIES

## **Green Industry is Part of Colorado's Water Conservation Solution**

The green industries of Colorado have been part of the water supply solution for decades by implementing measures that have significantly reduced outdoor water use. This fact sheet has been prepared by the Green Industries of Colorado (GreenCO) - an alliance of seven, not-for-profit trade associations representing all facets of horticulture and landscape industries - and Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC), the state's largest green industry association member.

According to the Colorado Water Plan, only 3% of all water consumed in Colorado is used on landscapes, including residential and commercial landscapes as well as parks, sports complexes, golf courses, etc. GreenCO holds the position that efficient outdoor water use and beautiful outdoor spaces are compatible and achievable. The industry actively promotes the responsible use of water and other natural resources through the creation of best management practices that have been widely embraced.

The landscape industry contributes more than \$2 billion to Colorado's economy and employs more than 43,000 people in Colorado. It has one of the most ethnically and socioeconomically diverse workforces of any industry. As an essential business during the pandemic, green companies are keeping people employed and providing jobs to those who lost their jobs in other industries.

## **Need and Benefits of Landscapes**

The drought of 2002 was a 'wake-up call' for everyone including the green industry. A knee-jerk reaction at that time was to simply discontinue outdoor watering. However, water utilities and municipalities realized discontinuing urban landscape irrigation and letting landscapes die is not a solution and creates a myriad of other problems.

A 2015 Colorado State University study, The Hidden Value of Landscapes: Implications for Drought Planning, quantified how the 3% of water used for landscapes benefits the environment, protects and preserves wildlife and improves physical and mental health. The study documents significant benefits including reduced heating and cooling requirements, better air quality, preserved wildlife habitats and reduced greenhouse gas emissions and economic considerations. For example, Denver's tree canopy alone provides the city with air quality benefits in excess of \$1.7 million. Time spent in landscapes also provides measurable improvements in physical and psychological health and child development.

The study reinforced that landscapes are a good investment. Attractive landscapes translate into a property's economic value by providing curb appeal that draws homebuyers, shoppers and other customers. Businesses with attractive and well-maintained landscapes enjoy more retail traffic, higher occupancy rates and reduced crime. Landscaping can add as much as 15% to the resale value of a home and speed up its sale by as much as six weeks. It's an investment that enhances our quality of life and expands usable living space at home. A 5% investment in landscaping can raise the value of a home by 15% - a net 150% return on your investment.

## **Water Conservation Through Best Management Practices - It's Working**

The landscape industry, in partnership with water utilities and the Colorado Water Conservation Board, has taken a lead in developing solutions to the current and future water crisis. GreenCO developed Best Management Practices (BMPs) after the 2002 drought in cooperation with Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, Denver Water, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District and Wright Water

Engineers, along with input from a broad group of conservation, education, engineering, landscape, plant and water experts across the state. The BMPs are the basis for many municipal codes, state laws and state-mandated water conservation plans.

Water conservation measures implemented by the industry and water providers are working. For a large portion of the metro area, even though the population has steadily increased, water use remains at lower levels achieved after the 2002 drought. Two of the metro area's largest utilities have seen significant reductions in water use. Denver Water reports that its customers are using 22% less water than they were prior to the 2002 drought. Aurora Water had reduced water use 36% since the early 2000s.

According to water providers, more water is saved outdoors than indoors, a significant accomplishment since outdoor irrigation only happens 3-4 months out of the year. Landscapes can survive and thrive with less water. Bottom line, the BMPs are working, but the green industry recognizes more can still be done.

### **Increased Water Reduction Through the Sustainable Landscape Management Initiative**

In 2019, ALCC implemented the Sustainable Landscape Management program (SLM), which educates both public and private landscape professionals in utilizing sustainable landscape management principles. Based upon the BMPs, SLM principles systematically reduce water consumption and plant loss in managed landscapes. SLM sets the same standards for all landscape professionals and creates a blueprint to increase water conservation and reduce plant loss.

By following SLM guidelines, every landscape professional in the state - both public and private - who maintains landscapes can reduce the amount of water they use. The manual, *Sustainable Landscape Management: A Guide to More Sustainable Landscapes in Colorado*, by Janet Waibel was drafted with input by landscape companies, municipalities, water providers and property managers from across the state, including the Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado Parks and Recreation, Denver Water and the Denver Metro Building Office Managers Association, among others. More than 200 individuals and companies have earned a certificate to date.

### **GreenCO's Position**

The green industry recognizes and embraces the need for ongoing conservation and balancing water needed for the overall water supply with that needed for plant health. The industry has and continues to advocate for sensible, science-based methods that reduce water use and maintain plant health. The industry also encourages the widespread acceptance and use of the BMPs and the newly created Sustainable Landscape Maintenance program.

State and/or municipal mandates prohibiting landscape installations are the wrong solution to a nonexistent problem. Landscape renovations and installations are often completed to reduce water use through the planting of water-efficient plants and adding more hardscapes that reduce irrigated areas, saving water in the long term. Policies that eliminate outdoor watering or prohibit the installation of landscape or certain plants have consequences that far outweigh the benefits, including loss of jobs and state tax revenues as well as the environmental and social consequences outlined above.

Coloradoans value outdoor living and greatly benefit from the 3% of all the state's water that is used for landscapes. The approach developed by Colorado's green industries will help preserve these beneficial landscapes with less water. The green industry looks forward to continued collaboration to protect our most precious resource.

More information at [www.greenco.org](http://www.greenco.org) and [www.alcc.com](http://www.alcc.com) or call (303) 757-5611.



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