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The General Assembly considered multiple bills related to water, including legislation focused on project funding, xeriscaping, studying various water challenges across the state, and stream restoration.

### Funding Water

The General Assembly passed multiple bills related to funding water projects across Colorado.

**Water Projects Funding.** The General Assembly passed *House Joint Resolution 23-1007*, which approves projects eligible for funding through the water project revolving funds. The Colorado Water Resources and Power Development Authority administers the funds and distributes low interest rate loans for water quality projects.

In addition, *Senate Bill 23-177* appropriates almost \$70 million to the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Division of

Water Resources for specific water-related projects.

**Water Quality Funding.** Two bills passed this session specifically address water quality and funding water quality efforts in Colorado. *Senate Bill 23-267* allows Chatfield State Park to establish a fee of up to \$2.00 for the Chatfield Watershed Authority. The authority must spend at least 25 percent of the revenue on water quality projects in Chatfield State Park.

The Joint Budget Committee also recommended *Senate Bill 23-238*, which was passed by the General Assembly. The bill directs the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to use the Small Communities Water and Wastewater Grant Fund to leverage federal funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. It is estimated that \$6 million from this fund would be able to secure up to \$60 million in federal funds.

### Xeriscaping

In 1981, Denver Water coined the term xeriscape to refer to water efficient landscaping, and the General Assembly has routinely passed laws aimed at increasing this activity across Colorado.

*Senate Bill 23-178* further restricts the ability of a common interest community, like a homeowners' association (HOA), to limit xeriscaping activities on a homeowner's



property. An HOA may not currently prohibit an individual property owner from utilizing xeriscape techniques. This bill expands this provision to also allow homeowners to also utilize non-vegetative landscaping.

## The Colorado River Drought Task Force

In response to the ongoing drought on the Colorado River, the General Assembly created the Colorado River Drought Task Force with *Senate Bill 23-295*, which is tasked with developing recommendations for legislation that will provide tools to address drought in the Colorado River Basin. The 17-member task force is comprised of representatives from state agencies, local governments, tribes, water engineers, agricultural and environmental interests, and other stakeholders. The task force must also establish a sub-task force made up of Colorado tribes, the Department of Natural Resources, and other stakeholders to study tribal matters. On July 13, the Executive Committee selected the Langdon Group to facilitate the task force.

## Groundwater

*House Bill 23-1220* requires the Colorado Water Center at Colorado State University to study the economic impacts of groundwater withdrawal in the Republican River Basin in Colorado, Kansas, and Nebraska if Colorado does not meet its obligation to retire 25,000 acres of irrigated lands under the terms of the South Fork Focus Zone Resolution. The center must update the General Assembly on its progress in 2025, and deliver and post online the final report

of the findings and conclusions of the study by January 1, 2026.

In addition, *House Bill 23-1125* updates the process of changing groundwater well owner information. The bill removes the requirement that certain forms be submitted in person, by mail, or fax, and requires any forms be submitted within 63 days after a change well ownership transaction occurs.

## Stream Restoration

In an effort to make it easier to perform stream restoration projects, *Senate Bill 23-270* outlines what qualifies as a stream restoration project. The bill states that a project that is designed and constructed in a natural stream system that is limited to specific minor restoration activities does not cause material injury to a vested water right and is not considered an unnecessary dam or other obstruction.

## The General Assembly

During the 2022 legislative interim, the Water Resources and Agriculture Review Committee (WRARC) recommended a bill to make the committee a year-round committee. This bill became *Senate Bill 23-010*, which was passed by the General Assembly. In addition to making the WRARC a year-round committee, it also requires the committee meet at least four times per year and removes the limit on the number of field trips the committee can take each year.

