

FAQs: Lower Arkansas Valley Water Sharing Program

What is “water sharing”?

Water sharing is a method of obtaining water supplies by balancing agriculture and municipal needs. One way to achieve this is by helping farmers invest in irrigation efficiencies, but it can also include short-term lease agreements, shared water storage, and well augmentation agreements.

Water sharing removes some water from the land for other uses. However, the purpose of these agreements is to minimize permanent reductions in irrigated agriculture as well as the associated socio-economic impacts.

The Colorado Water Plan sets a goal of achieving 50,000 acre-feet of water through voluntary water sharing agreements by 2030. Our program is consistent with both the Colorado Water Plan and the Arkansas Basin Implementation Plan.

LEARN MORE

www.csu.org/Pages/AgWaterSharing.aspx

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Why does Colorado Springs Utilities have a water sharing program?

Currently between 60-70% of our water is sourced from the Colorado River Basin (includes reuse). Prolonged drought has put this supply at risk.

To mitigate this risk and meet future customer needs, we are seeking collaborative opportunities to develop supplies through our [Arkansas Valley Water Sharing Program](#).

This program prioritizes partnerships with the agricultural community in the Lower Arkansas Valley of Colorado. It also supports our [Sustainable Water Plan](#), which identifies a need to acquire 15,000-25,000 acre-feet*/year of new supply through agricultural transfers in our native river basin over the next 40+ years.

**In Colorado Springs, one acre-foot of water can support 3-4 families/year.*



How does water sharing work?

Water sharing is based on collaboration and balancing available water supplies between agriculture and municipalities. These can take different forms.

Our program often involves the installation of center pivot irrigation on previously flood irrigated acreage. Through this more efficient irrigation method, the farmer can maintain and sometimes even increase crop productivity within the “circle” of irrigated field, and we are able to acquire the water shares no longer needed to irrigate the corners of the field.

In a 3-in-10-year lease agreement, we can use the farmer’s water in 3 out of 10 years, typically following a dry year. The farmer lets the land rest (fallow) during the time we are using the water.

In both situations, our customer needs are met while water remains in agriculture and provides assurance for farming generations to come.

Why is it important to preserve agriculture in our basin?

Because we need one another. Farming in the Lower Arkansas Valley is an integral part of the Arkansas River Basin economy. The Pikes Peak region relies on many of the products produced by these farmers, including hay, vegetables and livestock.

Water sharing helps us and farmers manage water supplies while sustaining economic growth.

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Center pivot irrigation

If some water is removed from agriculture, are there any impacts?

Our program reduces large-scale transfers and permanent removal of water from agriculture, but some water will be removed for municipal use. We are mindful of impacts this might have to local economies and land conditions.

Because we anticipate many of our agreements will occur in Bent County, Colo., we've worked diligently with county officials to develop rules and mitigation that can streamline the permitting process for us and provide certainty to both entities. The resulting [intergovernmental agreement \(IGA\) with Bent County](#) limits permanent dry-up of historically irrigated land, assures revegetation of qualified acreage and provides economic and land management considerations for the county.

We also remain actively engaged with regional conservancy districts and canal companies to ensure we remain trusted partners in the region.

What are the origins of Colorado Springs Utilities' water sharing program?

We have a long history of partnership with agricultural entities in the Lower Arkansas Valley. However, we developed our first two projects under our current water sharing program beginning in 2016, including a first-of-its-kind partnership with the Lower Arkansas Water Management Association (LAWMA).

LAWMA is a member-owned, non-profit corporation that replaces out-of-priority depletions to the Arkansas River caused by members' well pumping. This is known as augmentation. We previously leased water to LAWMA, but our current agreement allowed us to acquire 2,500 shares that we take delivery of in 5 out of 10 years for an expected yield of approximately 2,050 acre-feet/year of fully consumable water. We also helped LAWMA acquire 500 acre-feet of water storage.

This is the first formal example of a water sharing agreement between a well augmentation company and a municipal water provider. LAWMA is considered an economic engine in the area and this agreement supports their reliability for their members.

Also developed in 2016 is our agreement with the Super Ditch Company, which allows us to lease 1,000 acre-feet of water in 3 out of 10 years.



The Ft. Lyon Canal in southeastern Colorado