

FROM THE RMSAWWA CHAIR

Navigating the Regulatory Landscape Together

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Greetings all! As we dive into the heart of summer, this issue's theme is a topic that touches every aspect of our daily work: *the Regulatory Landscape*.

In recent years, there has been plenty of discussion around PFAS and microplastics across the industry, and rightly so. These emerging contaminants increase health risks and pose significant technical and financial challenges for utilities of all sizes. However, I want to highlight other regulatory items that are perhaps less talked about but are certainly worth raising awareness of within our membership here in the region. Across Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming, we are witnessing legislative and regulatory shifts concerning water quality, water resources, water conservation and permitting that will impact how we do business for decades to come.

Here are several notable regulatory items currently reshaping our work in the Rocky Mountain region:

COLORADO'S WATER QUALITY PERMITTING EFFICIENCY (SB25-305):

Passed as an effort to make Colorado's water quality permitting process more transparent and responsive, this legislation directly addresses permit backlogs. It introduces mechanisms to speed up technical reviews. This means critical water and wastewater infrastructure projects can move from the drawing board to construction much more efficiently, while also increasing safe drinking water program inspections to keep our communities protected.

NEW MEXICO'S EXPANDED SURFACE WATER PROTECTIONS (SB 21):

Following the Supreme Court's *Sackett v. EPA* decision, which narrowed federal protections, New Mexico took action to modernize its Water Quality Act. This state-level legislation restores protections for intermittent streams and wetlands. It aims to protect the headwaters and surface waters that our communities rely on to remain safe from contamination and pollution, keeping local control over water quality.

WYOMING'S TEMPORARY WATER USE RIGHTS (SF0043):

Wyoming recently expanded its temporary water use agreements. The new law extends temporary water rights from two to five years and broadens their allowed beneficial uses. This change gives water managers and agricultural users flexibility to navigate prolonged

drought conditions and share resources, all while protecting existing water rights holders and allowing irrigation demands to adapt to changing conditions.

NEW MEXICO'S STRATEGIC WATER SUPPLY (HB 137):

New Mexico has established a \$75 million program to treat and use brackish water to combat increasing water scarcity. By directing this alternative water source toward manufacturing and clean energy, the state is proactively preserving its limited freshwater supplies for community drinking water. The legislation also provides unprecedented resources for aquifer mapping, giving us better data to manage our resources effectively.

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COLORADO'S PROHIBITION ON NON-FUNCTIONAL TURF (SB24-005):

Starting in January 2026, this legislation restricts the installation of non-functional turf, artificial turf and invasive plant species in commercial, institutional, industrial and HOA properties. By limiting high-water landscaping in areas where grass serves purely aesthetic purposes, Colorado will reduce irrigation demand while still allowing functional turf for parks and sports fields.

WYOMING'S VOLUNTARY PILOT CONSERVATION PROGRAM:

Currently advancing in the state landscape, this pilot program allows water rights holders in Wyoming's portion of the Colorado River basin – particularly the Green River basin – to voluntarily implement water conservation projects. Users could be compensated for fallowing fields or reducing irrigation. This proactive, voluntary measure is a vital tool for Wyoming to manage its consumptive water use.

NEW MEXICO'S WATER SECURITY PLANNING ACT FUNDING (HB 423):

This recent legislation appropriates \$62 million to the Office of the State Engineer to support local planning and water data management. Crucially, \$30 million of this is allocated to provide grants to regional water planning entities, bolstering the state's capacity to manage irrigation limits and secure drought resiliency. It also earmarks funds to enforce water rights along the Rio Grande.

Navigating these changing rules and standards can feel daunting, but remember: the Rocky Mountain Section is here to support our members. We view these challenges as opportunities for education and advocacy. Our committees are integrating these regulatory updates into our training programs to help prepare you for what is coming.

A fantastic place to dive into these topics is the **Rocky Mountain Water Conference, August 30 to September 2, in Keystone, Colorado**. This is our flagship event and an unmatched place to learn, share, network, build business and deepen friendships. Whether you are seeking technical insights on the new conservation rules or looking to collaborate with peers facing similar compliance challenges, the conference is the place to be.

Furthermore, as outlined in our **2030 Strategic Plan**, our new water policy task force, alongside the Colorado Water Utility Council, is dedicated to using our members' collective experience to inform decision-makers. This is the intent of the **Water Policy Leadership** strategic goal as proof in action. Read more inside this issue about how this strategic vision is moving forward.

As we face these regulatory hurdles, my message remains the same: **"Get Involved, Bring a Friend."** Engagement is the key to mastering these changes. Are you currently navigating a complex permitting process or evaluating a new conservation mandate? Share your knowledge by joining a committee or presenting a paper. Bring a younger professional or a colleague along with you to a section event.

Thank you for your continued dedication to our industry and the communities we serve. I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events as we tackle the regulatory landscape together. •

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