



## STAFF REPORT

**To:** Honorable Mayor and Members of Town Council

**Through:** David L. Corliss, Town Manager

**From:** Mark Marlowe, P.E., Director of Castle Rock Water

**Title:** **Update to Town Council on the Draft Douglas County Water Plan** [*Impacting the Entire Area of Douglas County*]

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### Executive Summary

The Douglas County Water Commission (Commission) was formed in 2024 to create a 2050 Douglas County Water Plan (Plan). The Commission hired Forsgren Associates, Inc. through a competitive process to complete the Plan for \$578,360. Key takeaways from the first draft of the Plan include:

- County is expected to grow from 400,000 to approximately 550,000 people with total water use currently around 73,000-acre feet (AF) per year and projections for future use at 102,000 AF per year.
- Summary data for all but two of the existing County water providers was collected and is summarized in the report, although Castle Rock Water (CRW) did identify mistakes in the presentation of our data which will be corrected.
- Available non-renewable groundwater supplies in the County using modern technical approach and data exceed expectations based on current State law required technical evaluations to the tune of approximately 36% (a good thing).
- Approximately 25 draft recommendations have been provided for the County as part of the Plan, some of which CRW supports. CRW's main comment on the recommendations is that the County should defer to water providers when a recommendation relates to their service area, see **Attachment A**.

The schedule and key remaining tasks for completion of the Plan include:

- Douglas County Water Commission Plan review meetings in February and March.
- Targeted focus groups with groundwater well users, water providers, developers and economic development organizations in 2026
- Launching of a public engagement webpage in Spring of 2026
- Hosting of a public Open House by the Douglas County Water Commission and the County Commissioners

- Adoption of the Plan by the Board of County Commissioners before the end of 2026 and currently scheduled for August.

### **Notification and Outreach Efforts**

There are no notification and outreach efforts underway by the Town, beyond CRW's updates to Castle Rock Water Commission and Town Council.

### **History of Past Town Council, Boards & Commissions, or Other Discussions**

This item was briefly reviewed with the Castle Rock Water Commission at the January 28, 2026, meeting.

### **Discussion**

The 144-page draft Plan discusses a number of items including an introduction, public outreach, land use, water providers, projected water demands, water supplies, non-renewable groundwater, demands versus supplies, water management strategies, and recommendations.

Land use and its nexus with water planning is a primary issue addressed in the Plan. Many of the communities in Douglas County do not have combined water and land use planning under a single agency. Castle Rock is an exception to this reality, and it is a reason that Castle Rock is a leader in water conservation and Coloradoscaping.

Douglas County is projecting growth by approximately 150,000 citizens through the planning window of 2050. Job growth of 56,000 jobs is expected to further impact water needs. Changing climate, particularly increases in temperature, is expected to impact both demand and supply. Water conservation and water reuse, two areas where CRW is a statewide leader, are identified as important aspects of sustainability for County water supplies.

In summary, the draft Plan identifies a growth in demand of an additional 29,000 acre-feet per year of water supply. Current water provider estimates, according to the Plan, only identify about 17,000 AF of new water supply. However, total existing supplies appear to exceed even future 2050 demands.

This is likely primarily because of the excess non-renewable groundwater supplies available County wide, although the Plan does not identify where these excess supplies are located. The concern remains that renewable water supplies are not a large enough component of the overall water supply now or in the future. The Plan therefore identifies the need for regulations, policies and programs to help fill this gap. The County already has eleven key policies in its 2040 Comprehensive Master Plan. These policies provide an excellent framework for the County and will be revisited as a result of the Plan.

The Plan summarizes the water providers in the County. There are 31 existing providers, 24 of which submitted data for the draft Plan. There are three major providers including Castle Rock Water, Parker Water and Highlands Ranch Water which use in excess of 10,000 AF per year and serve about 68% of County residents. There are eight medium providers, and the rest of the providers are considered small, using less than 1,000 AF per year.

Total estimated water demand in the County is currently roughly 73,868 AF per year. Average per capita use is much higher than that in Castle Rock (about 114 gallons per capita per day) at 167 gallons per capita per day. The largest use category in the County is residential making up about 66% of the total followed by commercial at 13%, irrigation at 10%, and multifamily at 9%. 2050 demand is estimated in the Plan to be 102,000 AF per year with County population going from 400,000 to 550,000. According to the draft Plan, roughly 52% of water supplies used in the County are renewable or reusable with the remaining 48% coming from non-renewable groundwater.

In chapter 7 of the Plan, Forsgren provided a comprehensive review of available non-renewable groundwater supplies in the County. There are approximately 10,500 wells in the County, 93% of which are low-capacity wells. Only about 10% of the non-renewable groundwater in the County is currently decreed. Total available paper non-renewable groundwater is around 710,000 AF per year.

Water management strategies are reviewed including water conservation, water-wise landscaping (Coloradoscaping), water reuse, and conjunctive use (balancing renewable supplies and using non-renewable supplies to supplement in periods of drought).

The final section of the Plan addresses recommendations going forward. As noted in the Executive Summary section, CRW provided comments on these recommendations for the County to use.

Overall, the first draft of the Plan needs comprehensive editing. The section on non-renewable groundwater is well-developed, but the rest of the Plan lacks details and critical information.

Major components currently missing from the draft Plan include sections on the current and future mix of non-renewable groundwater supplies and renewable supplies, where non-renewable groundwater supplies are still available and untapped, what the renewable supply goal for the County as a whole should be, connectivity between water providers, water conservation and landscaping requirements used by the existing water providers, long term water plans for existing water providers (e.g. do other providers have a Water Resources Strategic Master Plan like Castle Rock) and what high level projects those plans include, and regional partnerships between the existing water providers (existing and future potential).

Drawings should be added to the Plan showing where non-renewable groundwater supplies are still untapped as a resource for existing water providers and future areas of development. Additionally, drawings should be added to the Plan of existing and future planned connections between the existing water providers as well as identifying other opportunities to connect water providers to create emergency redundancy and reliability. Water conservation, landscaping requirements, water reuse, and conjunctive use should be identified at a high level for each water provider to get a better sense of who already has these important management strategies in place.

A whole section of the Plan should identify large long-term water projects for renewable water supplies currently being planned and implemented by water providers. Examples of huge

projects which could attract additional investment or create regional partnerships being implemented by Castle Rock include the Chatfield Pump Back and the Box Elder Project.

Regional partnerships involving the various Douglas County water providers like the South Metro Water Supply Authority, Chatfield Reservoir, WISE, Cherry Creek Project Water Authority, Rueter Hess Reservoir, the Platte Valley Water Partnership, the Sedalia lift station and force main (partnership between Castle Rock and Douglas County), and the Plum Creek Water Reclamation Authority should be discussed in a full section of the plan along with additional opportunities for regional partnerships to share infrastructure and lower costs for existing and future residents.

### **Budget Impact**

There is no immediate budget impact to CRW. A few of the recommendations from the Plan advocate for the County to support existing water provider turf removal programs and renewable water infrastructure with financial resources. As a result, the Plan could have some limited positive impacts to CRW's budget.

### **Staff Recommendation**

CRW recommends providing input to the County on the draft Plan, especially on the recommendations, see ***Attachment A***.

### **Attachments**

Attachment A: Comments on the draft Plan for County consideration  
Attachment B: Douglas County 2025 Usage