



WATER IN THE WORKS

AN ELBERT CREEK WATER COMPANY QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
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A Message from ECWC

Hello, and welcome to the Spring 2024 edition of *Water in the Works*, a quarterly newsletter published by Elbert Creek Water Company (ECWC). The purpose of this newsletter is to improve communication between ECWC customers and staff while providing customers with useful and informative articles, ideas, and updates about our distribution area.

Elbert Creek Water Company's 2023 Water Quality Report

ECWC's water quality report, or "Consumer Confidence Report" (CCR), for the 2023 calendar year is now available to view online at our website. To view the report, please click the following link:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600862ade344bd2f8788cee0/t/65f1db8c886db855ae81aa63/1710349196886/ECWC+2023+CCR.pdf>

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to us at 970-382-6750 or info@elbertcreekh2o.com.

Wastewater Sewer Collection System Cleaning and Inspection



ECWC's hydraulic jetting/scrubbing unit

As sewer collection systems age, the risk for deterioration and blockages increases. It is important for wastewater collection utilities to have a maintenance program in place to clean and inspect pipelines to ensure proper performance and prevent future blockages and failures.

Elbert Creek Water Company (ECWC) is taking proactive measures to improve the performance of the collection system. ECWC has purchased a hydraulic jetting/scrubbing unit that will be used to routinely clean gravity sewer lines to remove grease and debris that accumulates in collection lines. This cleaning prevents future blockages and backups. ECWC will also be conducting camera inspections to better understand the materials and conditions of the system as well as identify areas that might need future attention. ECWC will actively be conducting this maintenance work over the next several months to keep your wastewater flowing. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact ECWC.

Water-Wise Practices to Adopt in Preparation for Summer



Spring and summer in Southwestern Colorado are beautiful, and are also ECWC's busiest seasons. Many of our customers and residents are starting to come back to Durango in preparation for the summer season ahead. One of the great components of living in this area is nature, including the extensive landscaping (both natural and man-made) around the community. Unfortunately, Durango and the Southwest are prone to extreme drought conditions. This past winter's snowfall was not as robust as anticipated, so there is cause for concern as snow begins to melt quickly and temperatures rise. Water conservation is a pressing issue, as is wildfire danger. ECWC promotes water conservation across its distribution system through its water rates and water-use practices, including selling reclaimed water to Glacier's golf course for irrigation, encouraging watering at night, and using drip irrigation systems, among other practices. We encourage our customers to conserve water by planting native, drought-tolerant plants, and by irrigating on specific schedules to meet plants' needs without over- or under-watering. For more information on how you can conserve water and keep your landscaping in tiptop shape, please review ECWC's Water-Wise Landscaping presentation:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600862ade344bd2f8788cee0/t/62604f3825bd7c642bf96964/1650478909659/Glacier+Water+Wise+Landscaping.pdf>

Please also take a moment to review ECWC's Water Conservation Policy:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600862ade344bd2f8788cee0/t/61a798d43264f8256fa11484/1638373588950/ECWC+Appendix+B+2+28+19.pdf> ; and ECWC's

approved irrigation schedule and procedures:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/600862ade344bd2f8788cee0/t/61a798b9ecec2c7e4a661b32/1638373562042/ECWC+Appendix+C+2+28+19.pdf>

“Do Your Job”: Colorado Lawmakers Tell Congress to Boost Funding for Deteriorating Southwestern Water System

By Shannon Mullane, for Water Education Colorado

Colorado lawmakers say they want Congress to do its job and fund repairs to a deteriorating irrigation system in southwestern Colorado.

The irrigation system, called the Pine River Indian Irrigation Project, is one of 16 federal projects in the West that have fallen into disrepair. The maintenance backlog is extensive and would cost more than \$2.3 billion to address. State legislators passed a resolution Friday calling on Congress to fully fund one key pot of money. “It’s just a letter to Congress to go do your job,” said Sen. Cleave Simpson, a Republican from Alamosa.

The federally managed Pine River Indian Irrigation Project includes about 175 miles of earthen ditches, metal headgates and concrete diversion structures. About 400 water users, including about 100 non-Native farmers and ranchers, rely on water from the system to support their agricultural businesses. Residents in the nearby town of Ignacio use its water for their lawns and gardens. [Parts of the project have collapsed](#) and been abandoned. Ditches have eroded to the point that water can’t reach diversion points. Multiple large, antiquated flumes — like the Butzbaugh Flume, a pipe raised on concrete stilts that carries water over farmland — are in danger of failing. At the wrong time of year, an upstream break could cut off water to hundreds of acres of farmland.

Estimates to repair the Pine River project have ranged from \$20 million to \$109 million. “This system is a federal project, and we have been absorbing the costs associated with maintenance for the benefit of these farmers and ranchers for decades,” Southern Ute Chairman Melvin Baker told state legislators during the annual Ute Day address at the Capitol on Friday.

In 2016, Congress passed the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, which directed the Secretary of the Treasury to deposit \$35 million each year into the Indian Irrigation Fund. But since 2018, [Congress has spent \\$10 million annually](#), less than a third of the allowed amount, from the fund to address maintenance issues.

“The United States has failed to live up to its responsibility to adequately fund and maintain the Pine River Indian Irrigation Project,” U.S. Sen. Michael Bennet wrote in a prepared statement in January. “This project is a priority of mine and I will continue to work with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe to fully fund this critical infrastructure.”

Bennet did not respond to requests for comment or for clarification about why Congress spent less than it could have to address the maintenance backlog. Neither did U.S. Rep. Lauren Boebert, whose district includes southwestern Colorado.

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe and the Bureau of Indian Affairs disagree over what type of responsibility the bureau has regarding the Pine River project — another factor complicating efforts to fix the maintenance backlog. The Indian irrigation projects receive funding from other sources, like dues paid by irrigators and funding buckets attached to the \$1 trillion infrastructure legislation that passed in 2021.

Southern Ute representatives focused on the Indian Irrigation Fund during Colorado River Drought Task Force meetings in 2023. The task force, a group of water experts assembled by the state legislature to make water policy recommendations, suggested the state legislature send a letter to Congress as one of its top recommendations for the 2024 session.

Four state legislators, including Simpson, [put forward a resolution](#) calling on Congress to meet the maximum allocations for the \$35 million fund. “A memorial like this from the Colorado General Assembly has to carry some weight,” Simpson said. “I’ve never been on the other end of them, so I don’t know, but I would hope it would raise it to a level of, ‘All right, we need to pay more attention.’”

Legislators adopted the resolution during Ute Day at the legislature, when representatives from several Ute tribes visited the state Capitol and advocated for tribes’ health care, economic and environmental priorities. “Water is critical to our way of life,” Baker, the Southern Ute chairman, told the General Assembly before thanking several legislators for their responsiveness in securing funding for the irrigation project. “We are protecting the water for our current needs, and we’re protecting water for future generations.”



A steady stream of water leaks out of Butzbaugh Flume on Jan 19 in southwestern Colorado. The flume is part of the Pine River Indian Irrigation Project. As part of the project’s main ditch, it carries water to hundreds of acres of irrigable land around the Southern Ute reservation and La Plata County.

Original article can be found at the following link:

<https://www.watereducationcolorado.org/fresh-water-news/do-your-job-colorado-lawmakers-tell-congress-to-boost-funding-for-deteriorating-southwestern-water-system/>

How do Colorado Ski Areas Prepare for a Changing Climate? Ask Eldora Mountain Resort

By Shannon Mullane, for The Colorado Sun

Eldora Mountain Ski Resort is eyeing new water storage sites in Boulder and Gilpin counties as it plans for more ski runs and a drier future. Eldora isn't the only ski resort in Colorado that's in need of more water to make snow, and to operate toilets, water fountains and restaurant kitchens. Ski resorts make up a tiny slice of Colorado's overall water use, but they'll likely need to boost their supply by about 41% by 2050, according to state estimates.

In December, Eldora started the vetting process in water court for its hoped-for storage expansion — a proposal to turn three natural depressions into storage ponds and expand three existing reservoirs. In response, some concerned citizens are calling for more transparency, citing environmental concerns and trying to avoid any negative impacts to downstream water users. “We know that climate change is real, and we've got to anticipate having some low-weather years where we need more water storage just to stay in business,” said Brent Tregaskis, the resort's general manager. “That's a big part of my motivation, is to be prepared for the future.”

Eldora Mountain Resort, located 21 miles west of Boulder, offers 680 acres of terrain to beginners, experts and any Front Range snow fanatics hoping to avoid the Interstate 70 traffic jams on the way to larger resorts. Eldora wants more water primarily to make more snow. Snowmaking — which typically involves pumping water from ponds through machines that spew out snow onto the slopes — has been vital for resorts since the 1980s as a way to guarantee good runs even when snow storms are few and far between. Throughout Colorado, resorts collectively used about 5,620 acre-feet of water per year to make snow as of 2015, according to the Colorado Water Conservation Board, a state water policy agency. By 2050, that use is expected to increase marginally to 7,950 acre-feet per year.

Cities, towns and industries like the ski industry will also face water shortages by 2050. Statewide, the gap could be up to 740,000 acre-feet in dry years, according to the 2023 Colorado Water Plan. One acre-foot roughly equals the annual water use of two to three households. For snowmaking, resorts need dependable water supplies in dry years — and for that water to be usable in the winter, resorts need storage. “The name of the game was storage. That's the bottom line,” said Glenn Porzak, a water lawyer who has worked with resorts for more than 30 years to corral water rights and develop storage. Eldora uses about 320 acre-feet of water storage in Peterson Lake, Lake Eldora and Kettle Pond. But even with that capacity, the resort had eight runs that it could not make snow on this year, according to Eldora.

The resort also needs more water to make snow for its already-approved Jolly Jug expansion, which will add five ski trails, including 27 acres of cut trails and 35 acres of gladed skiing. In December, Eldora Enterprises LLC submitted an application to Division 1 Water Court to explore its options to start storing more water. Its application includes options to enlarge the three existing ponds and to build small, earthen dams on natural depressions to create ponds at three new sites: Lake Theo, Boneyard Pond and Little Hawk Pond. The new sites' surface areas would be between 1.5 acres to 4 acres, and all six ponds are on the resort's property. If the water court approves all of the sites, the resort could access up to 197 acre-feet of additional storage for a total of around 517 acre-feet, according to Eldora. For reference, Dillon, Cheesman, Cherry Creek, Reudi, Blue Mesa and many other main reservoirs in Colorado store between 79,000 acre-feet and 829,500 acre-feet of water. If approved, the new water rights would be very junior, dating to 2023 or 2024, which means the resort would only get this new water when there is more than enough to go around. More senior, downstream rights in the same river basin date back as early as 1859 and get water first in times of shortage.

The water court process can take years, and the resort would need to go through environmental analyses, permitting processes and financial planning to actually turn any of the storage sites into a reality. “We're on the east side of the divide, so we serve a great need to the Front Range. And we're a busy, smaller ski area, and we don't get as much snow on this side of the divide,” Tregaskis said. “We would not be in business if it weren't for snowmaking.”

The plan has drawn opposition. The environmental group Save The World's Rivers called for more transparency and community engagement to ensure that the area's watershed is protected. The Water Users Association of District No. 6 — which comprises the majority of senior water rights holders in the Boulder Creek basin, like Boulder County, Lafayette and large agricultural diverters — primarily wants to make sure no downstream diverters are adversely impacted. Downstream water users expect water to arrive at the time, location and amount it's supposed to arrive in, said Scott Holwick, an attorney at Lyons Gaddis who represents the association. “They're entitled to all the water coming down the creek, and Eldora's entitled to exactly zero of that if the people below have a need for it and can use it,” Holwick said. “If what Eldora is doing changes the amount that's coming down, then the people below could say you're ‘injuring’ me.” Residents in the nearby town of Nederland have raised questions about environmental impacts, said Miranda Fisher, town and zoning administrator for Nederland. “Our community is aware. Our community is concerned, from the ones I've heard from. I don't want to speak for the majority,” Fisher said. “What is the long-term impact if there's more diversion happening off the stream? Infrastructure development, what would that look like for Eldora?” Water is the town's No. 1 infrastructure priority, Fisher said. Currently, the town's needs are met by a junior water right to 39.6 acre-feet. But with growth on the horizon, Nederland wants to secure rights to an additional 100 acre-feet of water. That means the town is also looking for storage reservoir locations nearby. Nederland's town board, attorneys and engineers are reviewing Eldora's proposal to determine if there are any possible impacts to the town's water, Fisher said. “We're all sourcing from the same stream, and so it's really important that we understand what they're doing, and of course when the time comes, that they understand what we're doing,” she said.

Eldora's storage sites are near or in several critical wildlife habitat areas designated by Boulder County. Elk migrate through the nearby Arapaho Ranch. Peterson Lake has been a home to the Rocky Mountain capshell, a small freshwater mollusk that is federally designated as a sensitive species. The mollusk can only live at certain elevations, and in Colorado, it has only been found in Boulder County. In the county, surveys have only found it at Peterson Lake, said Susan Spaulding, an environmental resources specialist for Boulder County. Lake Eldora is in the Buckeye Basin, another designated habitat in part because beavers and a plant called willow carrs have been found there. The thick willow stands comprise 1% of the mountain landscape in Boulder County and support three times the breeding birds compared to other habitats. Willow carrs are highly sensitive and could be impacted by changing flows in streams, like if water levels are depleted because more water is diverted or stored upstream. “Less water flow, then there's less water for the willows,” Spaulding said. “However this works out into the future, we would happily work with Eldora Ski Resort — again, as we have in the past — to comment on any sort of habitat mitigations that might be helpful.” For its part, Eldora said its plans put a heavy emphasis on environmental needs. “This was a solution that had the least environmental impact of any other solution. ... Everything else was moving more earth, or potentially building a new dam,” Tregaskis said. “We really tried to do this in a way that had the smallest environmental impact as possible.”