

## COLORADO POLICY PATHWAYS



At American Whitewater, we know that water policy is a key ingredient in driving smart solutions for the future of the state. Our new report, *Colorado Policy Pathways*, outlines policy solutions to address the changes and challenges that Colorado's rivers face as our population grows, the outdoor economy booms, and the urban/rural divide persists, and details our core principles and our approach to the 2020 Colorado Legislative Session and beyond.

### CORE PRINCIPLES

While no one-size policy fits all communities in a state as varied as Colorado, river stewardship is the key to the state's sustainable future. Wise water policy can address many dimensions of the change-drivers noted above, and we see many opportunities to **drive economic development in a community-based, equitable, and impactful way.**

With its booming cities, the Front Range powers much of Colorado's economy. However, millions of people spend their dollars in the rural regions of the mountains and the Western Slope. These rural communities rely on local rivers and creeks to drive their economies, and American Whitewater supports policies to:

- help keep these rivers healthy;

- provide additional support to develop smart growth of the recreation economy that enriches and promotes the culture of rural Colorado, and
- Enable community-backed, community-led growth.

We also urge lawmakers to join us in our commitment to **strengthen Colorado's built infrastructure** in order to ensure safe access to recreation areas. Following a pattern seen nationally, Colorado roads and bridges are in urgent need of repair, upgrade, and investment.

Overcrowding and access will become even larger issues as growth continues. In the 2019 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, the State of Colorado acknowledges that two of the top three barriers to outdoor recreation

Colorado's rivers are an integral part of the state's economy. They provide long-term water security, environmental and economic sustainability, and draw visitors from around the globe for unparalleled recreation opportunities.



are overcrowding and congestion, and that we need long-term planning and maintenance of existing infrastructure to overcome this hurdle.

We support legislation that will strengthen and modernize the state's existing infrastructure; mitigate impacts on natural resources while ensuring access; prioritize investments that benefit natural resources whenever possible; and ensure safety in infrastructure that supports river access.

Across Colorado, teachers, healthcare workers and community leaders are encouraging people to spend more time outdoors, which is beginning to show benefits in lower healthcare costs at a national level. A wealth of evidence shows that time spent outdoors easily correlates with lowered stress levels, improved well-being, and greater social connectedness.

River conservation policies are fundamental to providing all communities with access to the outdoors. The benefits of outdoor access are vital to communities across the socio-economic spectrum and span the urban/rural divide. **American Whitewater will support policies that take into account community**

**driven economic development plans, public health benefits, and prioritize community wellness and quality of life, today, and for future generations.**

### **POLICY DIRECTIONS**

We strongly believe that all Colorado water policy should be based on the broadest possible representation of interests. As a bi-partisan organization, we find common cause with individuals, organizations, companies, elected officials, and communities that share our love of rivers, and see five distinct sets of opportunities for smart policymaking at the state level:

- **Preserving and enhancing instream flow protections** which support both environmental and human health and are essential to healthy rivers
- **Restoring Colorado's rivers** to a more natural state, including urban river restoration projects, to address impacts from water development, mining, and other human impacts that have degraded our rivers and river communities
- Modernizing, expanding and implementing **improved water supply forecasting** systems
- Protecting and enhancing

**recreational water rights** statewide through Recreational In Channel Diversions

- Supporting Wild and Scenic Designations and management plans

### **MOVING FORWARD**

*Colorado in Flux* outlines our approach to water policymaking in Colorado. We never work alone, and that is true now more than ever. We look forward to working with our members, business partners, stakeholders from other sectors, and fellow conservation advocates to make concrete gains for rivers and communities across the state.

Policy work is hard, plain and simple, but we've never let hard work steer us away. We're excited to work at all levels of government across the state in a way we never have before. We're devoted to expanding the circles we work within, while ensuring that our members and partners are included in the efforts on the horizon.

American Whitewater has always stood for the protection and restoration of our nation's whitewater rivers, ensuring that everyone can get out and enjoy them. We will carry that mission forward every step of the way on this journey, and hope this report guides the way.

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