



SOUTH METRO WATER SUPPLY AUTHORITY

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April 25, 2023

Douglas County Board of Commissioners  
100 Third Street  
Castle Rock, Colorado 80104

*Sent via electronic mail*

**RE: South Metro Water Supply Authority Conservation Program**

Dear Commissioners Laydon, Teal and Thomas,

As you know, the South Metro Water Supply Authority (SMWSA) is comprised of fourteen (14) water providers located in Douglas and Arapahoe Counties. Our member providers cover over eighty-five percent (85%) of the water service areas in Douglas County. Douglas County has been an important partner since we were formed in 2004, and through your partnership and the regional partnerships with others, we have made significant progress toward our mutual goals of increasing renewable water supplies, decreasing reliance on nonrenewable water, and water conservation.

I am writing today about an important opportunity. We all understand how essential water planning is, particularly in the face of climate variability and the growing uncertainty of future water supplies. Conservation is one of the most important planning tools we can use to actively meet these challenges. We would like to expand our conservation program offerings to Douglas County so our citizens can become even more efficient in their water use.

The County has provided \$10,000 per year in the past to help SMWSA develop our conservation programs, and we are requesting that the County consider increasing that to \$25,000. Those additional funds will enable us to strengthen our existing programs and bring more benefit to Douglas County in our water conservation efforts.

One such program is our Model Regional Water Efficient Landscape and Irrigation Ordinance. After partnering together in 2015 to identify outdoor water conservation efficiency efforts that can benefit the region as a whole and promote regional partnering, SMWSA and Douglas County recommended the model ordinance be developed to provide a comprehensive set of water-efficient landscape and irrigation standards that are applicable for the south metro Denver area's hydrologic and climate conditions. The model ordinance contains a compendium of best management practices for water providers seeking to provide land use and development support to their communities. Sterling Ranch in partnership with Botanic Gardens has taken the next steps in these best management practices to create

innovative landscapes with proven lower water demands, developing standards that could be used by other new developments in the County. This is critical in that many of the water providers in the south metro front range do not have immediate land use control and yet have a vested interest in ensuring the best use of their water supplies. At the time it was prepared, the model ordinance included many of the landscape and irrigation criteria that were being practiced in Castle Rock, the only SMWSA member with land use authority. As more emphasis has been placed on understanding the nexus between water and land use planning in recent years, other SMWSA members are now anticipating new opportunities to implement portions of the model ordinance. It is timely to review the 2015 work and update it, as we find our region in dryer climes.

Another program offering is our Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL) program. SMWSA is one of three groups in Colorado offering this program. QWEL educates landscapers about “Colorado-scape” (previously known as xeriscape), plants and soil amendments, efficient irrigation system designs and best irrigation practices, the standards described in the model ordinance, and upon completion of the course, provides them with a certificate as evidence of their enhanced training. SMWSA, in coordination with Castle Rock Water, has now graduated over 200 professionals from the QWEL program and is working to develop continuing education programs on urban landscapes, heat-tolerant grasses and plants, and additional efficiency innovations. QWEL has also been translated and is now being offered in Spanish through SMWSA. SMWSA would like to expand the reach of the QWEL program to offer more courses in the future.

Lastly, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCBC) has been tasked with implementing SB 22-1151, legislation that created a pilot turf replacement program for communities in Colorado. SMWSA has applied for grant funds under the program for the development of a turf replacement program under the Authority’s Conservation Subcommittee. The majority of SMWSA water providers currently do not offer their ratepayers turf replacement programs or support. If SMWSA is successful, we will use grant funds to develop a Turf Replacement Program for interested SMWSA members in their service areas, including messaging, marketing, and assistance with fund management. It is anticipated that the primary customer class will be residential and homeowner associations within member service area boundaries. Turf will be replaced with Colorado-scape plantings and other attractive, high heat tolerant species, creating a truly beautiful western landscape. Utilizing data received from this initial pilot (anticipated to be two years in length), SMWSA members will be able to assess the value to their customers of offering a novel turf replacement program into the future. The Program does require a fifty percent (50%) funding match from successful grantees.

SMWSA and our Conservation Subcommittee are excited to offer these programs to you and in return, we will highlight the County’s support through specific program sponsorship. I would be delighted to come and speak with you and describe in more detail these Conservation Programs, as well as tell you more about our updated Master Plan progress and statewide involvement in all things water. Thank you again for your past support and continued consideration. I look forward to continuing our relationship in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lisa Darling". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Lisa Darling, Executive Director