

Taking Care of Business

For Colorado businesses, water stewardship and risk management is a matter of accountability—and the bottom line.

BY JOSH CHETWYND

You don't need an MBA to know Colorado businesses have a math problem when it comes to water. Business Insider named the state the fastest-growing economy in the nation just two years ago. At the same time, water resources to support those businesses—and the accompanying workforce—are finite, and companies are increasingly taking water risk into account.

"Water isn't someone else's problem to solve," says Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Kelly Brough. "We have to commit ourselves to changing behavior. And as a business community we can, and should, be the ones to lead on this."

In 2013, the Denver chamber named water one of its five priority issues (alongside education, energy, transportation, and engaging independent voters) and has no plans to take it off that list. As part of a multi-pronged approach in support of that commitment, the state's industry leaders have a long-standing policy of discouraging companies with hefty water consumption requirements to settle in Colorado.

For example, a few years ago, a large television maker with a water-intensive manufacturing process wanted to come to the state but was dissuaded by business leaders, according to Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation CEO Tom Clark. They were "highly consumptive and we were honest with them," Clark says. "You'd be here 10 years and then [you] would go away."

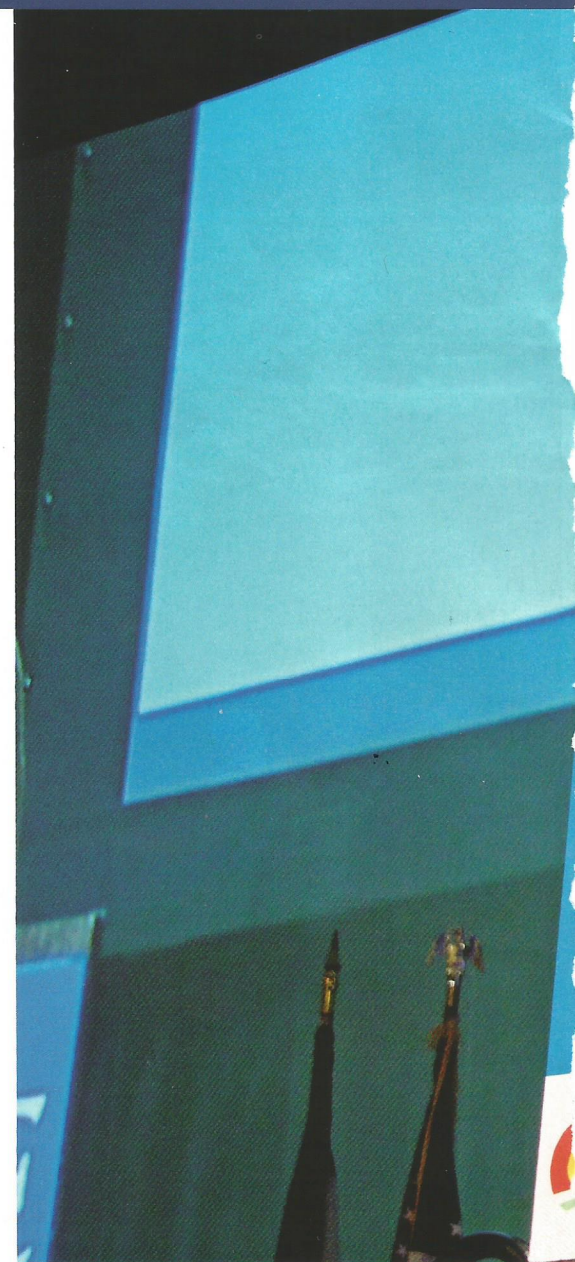
For the rank-and-file, the focus has been on education. In 2014, chambers of commerce throughout the state held briefings

in locations around the state for members discussing the essential economic impact of water. These events featured economists providing overviews on numerous water-related issues, including drought conditions and Colorado's Water Plan. In 2015, the Denver chamber followed up with a "State of Water" summit that attracted a group of about 200 from the business and water communities to discuss the state's water policies.

While leaders are looking to rally the troops on water, there are many businesses within the state that have already gotten the memo. They're paying attention to water because it makes economic sense to do so.

Kelly Bennett is a managing partner of Ponderosa Advisors, which runs Water Sage, an online tool that helps companies identify available water rights in Colorado and elsewhere. Bennett's business is growing, and he believes the increasing interest in water rights "highlights a recognition that in a place like the Front Range there is a growing number of users for a finite resource." This combination means stakeholders are increasingly keen to understand the legal process of securing and maintaining water rights, and, notes Bennett, there is also an economic imperative to be good stewards.

This economic importance of water isn't limited to companies seeking to control their water destiny. Even businesses that rely on municipal water providers recognize the financial upside of smart water use. "Businesses are interested in being water efficient because it is good for their bottom line," says Denver Water manager of conservation Jeff Tejral. "Direct eco-



omic value and return on investment has been a large consideration with every business we have worked with."

While business and industry take about 11 billion gallons of the overall 48 billion gallons of retail treated water delivered annually to Denver Water customers, total use by this sector has been trending downward in recent years. To advance this trend, Tejral's group has provided technical assistance for



The "triple bottom line" is an accounting framework that looks beyond a company's earnings and instead evaluates social, environmental and financial stability.



Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Kelly Brough issued a call to action to the Colorado business community at the first annual State of Water event hosted by the Denver chamber in late 2015, saying, "Water isn't someone else's problem to solve...we can, and should, be the ones to lead on this."

tral location and robust economy, the company values the state's general approach toward water stewardship.

"Colorado water utilities are among some of the most forward thinking and innovative in the country in regard to how they view conservation, technology and design," says Scott Ingvoldstad, CH2M's Colorado area manager and vice president of government relations. "As a company it's exciting to work with these types of organizations, and for our staff it keeps them engaged to find more cutting-edge approaches to our water challenges."

Even so, stress points are bound to materialize. Consider the newly emerging cannabis industry. John-Paul Maxfield, co-founder of the Organic Cannabis Association, says honing in on water issues is still a work in progress. He believes growers are water aware—and marijuana cultivation has proved far less water intensive than some other sectors such as garden nurseries and breweries—but says that, for the most part, cannabis cultivators are more focused on what they need to do to stay in compliance with so many other regulations.

Brough remains optimistic that the business community as a whole will continue to take the necessary steps to protect water resources. After all, beyond whatever people do professionally, water plays such a huge role in attracting people and employers to Colorado.

"The workforce comes here for quality of life, and snow and the mountains are a big part of that," Brough says. "We [as a business community] plan for what the workforce wants." ■

commercial customers looking to reduce water use, working with companies ranging from building owners looking to make their cooling towers more efficient to a restaurant chain that wanted to audit its water consumption. For the restaurants, it turned out a major culprit was overuse in the cleaning process. As a result, the company devised new techniques to cut its water bill while maintaining sanitary conditions.

For many Colorado companies the bank ledger isn't the only motivating factor when it comes to water. Take MillerCoors. Clearly, the brewing company, which employs 2,000 people in the state, has a vested interest in water quality and availability as it relates to its product. But it's making investments that stretch beyond simply pro-

tecting its own water sources. For example, taking a watershed approach, in 2014 MillerCoors teamed up with PepsiCo and the Wells Fargo Foundation to contribute \$1 million to The Nature Conservancy's work restoring healthy Front Range forests in order to lessen the threat of fire danger and ensure clean, sustainable water sources for Denver and neighboring communities. The brewer has also provided funding for a water quality management program at Emily Griffith Technical College in Denver.

It's that sort of ethos that continues to draw water-conscious companies to the state. For instance, CH2M, a global engineering firm known for its innovative work in the water space, moved to Colorado in the early 1980s. Along with Colorado's cen-

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