

# Rep. Gardner: Cutting Red Tape Key to Water Storage

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By Rep. Cory Gardner



Colorado's arid climate is something that touches every citizen and every corner of the state. Farmers and ranchers constantly lose sleep over having enough moisture for their fields and pasture. Growing communities like Firestone and Highlands Ranch worry about finding water resources for future residents.

Local governments regularly impose fire restrictions in rural and recreational areas. Urban regions, like Denver, see regular rate hikes and watering restrictions from the local water utility.

Most Coloradans make the best of these conditions, and after all, who can really complain when we enjoy over 300 days of sunshine a year? We also work on managing what limited water resources the state has at its disposal. However, recent wildfires have reminded us there is always more we can be doing to prepare ourselves for those years when our dry and arid climate moves into drought territory.

Severe drought can devastate our great state. According to recent reports, 98 percent of the state is considered to be suffering from drought conditions.

The snowpack conditions this year are 42 percent below average, which is eerily similar to those of 2002 when they were 44 percent below average.

During that year, Colorado experienced a severe drought and the state had a catastrophic wildfire season. The Hayman Fire burned tens of thousands acres of land, jeopardizing drinking water systems and destroying property. Farmers and ranchers also witnessed one of the driest years on record, with southeast Colorado losing half of its cow-calf herd.

It is important for our municipalities and farming communities to be confident there will be water available, even in years with low precipitation.

It is irresponsible to continue to put our communities, and agricultural and tourism industries at risk by not having a plan for more water storage in place.

My office has also been pressing the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation for answers on how they are addressing the issue of drought preparedness and what additional water storage projects they have approved since 2002.

It is critical we establish long-term water storage projects and not continue to put the future of our economy and community at risk.

Projects like the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP) are ready, and it is time we cut through the bureaucratic red tape and allow them to begin protecting and preserving Colorado's most precious resource.

Last year, runoff conditions actually sparked fears of flooding in northern Colorado. While there thankfully was no flooding, all we could do was watch as all that water flowed right out of our state. If we had more storage capacity, like NISP, that water could have stayed in Colorado. And the irony was not lost on Mother Nature. Just one year later, Colorado is struggling with below average levels of moisture.

Colorado is going to experience droughts from time to time, and we need to be prepared. We must have more than plans in place — we need action, like additional water storage, to show we have learned from past experiences on how best to prepare for drought.

*Rep. Cory Gardner represents the 4th Congressional District in Congress.*