

# Lower Risk: The Fort Collins Water Shortage Action Plan & 2020 Water Restrictions

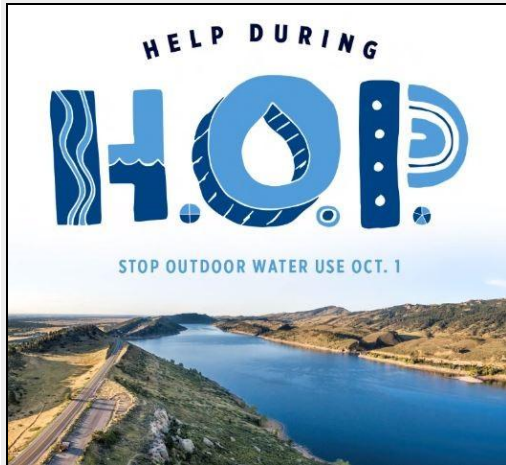
WEBSITE-WATER RESTRICTIONS  
WEBSITE-HORSETOOTH OUTLET PROJECT

Award Video



**2021 Merit Award: Growing Water Smart**

by Mariel Miller, AICP LEED AP Water Conservation Specialist



The Water Shortage Action Plan (Plan) was adopted in 2020 and included community-wide, water use priorities identification that led to the Plan's guiding principles and informed decisions about which types of water uses to restrict during a water shortage. The Plan guides water shortage response planning by defining water shortage conditions, appropriate water demand management tools such as water restrictions, internal processes for determining and declaring a water shortage, public communications, monitoring, and enforcement. This plan went through an extensive review and update in 2018-2019 and was implemented in May 2020. At that time, staff didn't know that they would almost immediately put new elements of the plan into action during a year of unprecedented circumstances.

In October 2020, Utilities had the potential for a water shortage because its ability to treat and deliver enough clean water to meet customer demands was at risk due to a combination of events:

Extreme drought.

1.

The largest wildfire in Colorado's history (the Cameron Peak Fire) in the Poudre River watershed, which provides half of the City's water.

2.

A critical infrastructure improvement project (the Horsetooth Outlet Project (HOP)) that temporarily limited access to the City's other water source, Horsetooth Reservoir.

3.

To reduce risk, emergency backup pumps were constructed to use during HOP in the event Poudre River water was unavailable because of an emergency. Even with all this planning and preparation, Utilities was still at risk of a water shortage.

The backup pumps could provide only 15 million gallons of water per day (MGD), which is equivalent to normal winter water use (not supporting typical irrigation levels, especially during a hot and dry October). To lower the risk of water shortage and customer service disruptions, the City Manager followed the Plan and enacted mandatory restrictions on most outdoor water uses for the duration of HOP. Customers responded immediately with a 44% decrease in total water



use in the first two days of October.

Updating the Plan, preparing for HOP and implementing water restrictions involved months of planning and preparation, extensive community-wide outreach, specific water-saving actions for water customers, including City departments, such as Parks, and implementation of an enforcement and exceptions permit process.

To document processes and outcomes, evaluate lessons learned, and plan for future events, staff prepared the 2020 Water Restrictions Overview, Outcomes, and Recommendations After-Action Report that provides a valuable and in-depth evaluation of the 2020 response and outcomes to support future shortage responses and guide updates to the Plan. With this real-life test, Utilities and its customers gained confidence in the Plan, its ability to improve resiliency during and respond effectively during challenging times.

*As adopted by Fort Collins City Council April 2020,  
as referenced in Section 26-167(a) of the  
Code of the City of Fort Collins*

# Water Shortage Action Plan

April 2020



City of  
**Fort Collins**  
Utilities