

Joro Walker General Counsel



As the General Counsel to Western Resource Advocates (WRA), Joro Walker works with program directors to identify appropriate opportunities throughout the region to leverage state and federal law to gain victories on land conservation, and air and water quality. She has been practicing law for more than 30 years.

While she started out as a civil rights and First Amendment lawyer, Walker made her way to WRA in 1999, founded the organization's Utah office, and became its director. Since then, her work has evolved from litigating environmental cases in Utah to developing regional policies. During that time, she developed an expertise in enforcing federal and state air quality and water quality laws. Because statutes and regulations

often require specific and significant government actions, they are a particularly effective way to safeguard public health and the environment.

Walker has championed several impressive WRA initiatives, including protecting more than 350,000 acres of public lands and developing management plans that conserve more than 500,000 acres of national forest in Utah. She also worked to expand sensitive wildlife habitats that are closed to oil and gas development to 5.5 million acres in Colorado, which was a major step forward to help protect the more than 9 million acres of land needed to reach the goal of protecting 30% of Colorado's land by 2030.

While her list of well-fought victories continues to grow, Walker has found a particularly impactful niche in using the law to protect and improve air and water quality and aquatic ecosystems and to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. She has challenged proposed discharges that threaten Great Salt Lake ecosystems, contested air quality permits issued to coal plants and oil and gas refineries, and worked tirelessly to ensure that Utah quickly adopts and implements plans to bring the Wasatch Front into attainment with national health-based air quality standards. Walker also used Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act laws and regulations to curb unlawful oil shale and tar sands development and to protect the most sensitive habitats in national forests from energy development and motorized vehicle abuse.

Because of her relentless dedication, 1,295 megawatts per year of new coal-fired energy generation have been canceled, avoiding 918 metric tons of carbon emissions in one of the most polluted areas in our region. Walker was also instrumental in scrapping more than 2,000 acres of oil shale mining that would have produced close to 1 million tons of carbon emissions and stopping the proposal to withdraw 353,000 acre-feet of water annually from Great Salt Lake, which threatened habitat for the 10 million birds that rely on the lake. Her efforts have reduced harmful air pollutants by more than 15,000 tons per year — the equivalent of removing approximately 970,000 passenger vehicles from the road each year.

More recently, Walker represented WRA in several key Colorado proceedings that promulgated rules to dramatically reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector, keep oil and gas development out of many key riparian areas, and help ensure that Colorado streams — including urban waterways — are protected from degradation. Over the years, Walker has received several community awards that honor her clean air and clean water advocacy. Our region, and especially Utah, is a healthier and more vibrant place because of Walker's dedication to saving the things we all treasure about the West.

Walker graduated from the University of Utah with a Master of Arts in Philosophy and a law degree.

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