

Laura Belanger

Senior Policy Advisor, Healthy Rivers



Laura Belanger is a senior policy advisor with Western Resource Advocates (WRA). In this role she finds creative ways to increase municipal water efficiency and reuse while protecting and restoring stream flows to benefit river health and aquatic life.

As climate change and overuse deplete Western waterways, Belanger focuses on safeguarding them. She develops and provides technical assistance on instream flow water right proposals and partners with agricultural producers and others on innovative water sharing agreements to keep water in rivers. In collaboration with Western water leaders, including through her involvement with the Upper Colorado River Recovery Implementation Program, she works to find opportunities to secure water to provide critical flows needed by aquatic life in the Colorado River Basin, and to help increase water levels in Lake Powell.

Belanger also helps communities use water more efficiently to increase their water security and do more with less. One such avenue is landscape transformation; from drafting state-level legislation to designing and launching tailored pilot programs, she supports municipalities with finding ways to replace unnecessary turfgrass and upgrade to more efficient irrigation systems. Additionally, she works to incentivize and advance municipal water reuse, which enable communities to further stretch their limited water supplies, which are increasingly threatened by climate change.

One of her proudest accomplishments while at WRA is working with municipal partners, state agencies, and other water stakeholders in Colorado to create the first comprehensive direct potable reuse regulations in the country. The regulations, which are a model for the nation and seven years in the making, can help communities statewide meet up to double the amount of demand with the same initial volume of water, thereby decreasing pressure on rivers and streams and reducing the need to develop new supplies.

Prior to joining WRA, Belanger was a water resources engineer with the Headwaters Corporation, where she advanced water projects to create and maintain species habitat for the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program. Before that, she was an environmental engineer with Hydrosphere Resource Consultants, a role that included advising clients on how to modify their operations to diminish impacts on rivers and aquatic ecosystems. It was this role that exposed her to WRA, and she was drawn to the organization's policy and municipal conservation efforts.

Since joining WRA in 2011, Belanger has enjoyed its collaborative approach and ability to accelerate progress on addressing urgent challenges. She believes that rivers and water supplies are a pressing issue that affects everyone and wants to be part of solutions that boost water sustainably for our communities while minimizing damage to streams and habitats.

In addition to being a licensed professional engineer in Colorado, Belanger is a member of the WaterReuse Association, the American Water Resources Association – Colorado chapter, and the Colorado Lake and Reservoir Management Association. She served as an agricultural diversification specialist while volunteering with the Peace Corps in Guatemala, where she focused on organic farming practices and nutrition education.

Belanger received a Bachelor of Arts in Social Thought and Political Economy from the University of Massachusetts and a Master of Science in Civil Engineering from the University of Colorado. She lives in Golden with her husband and black lab Daisy and stays busy by hiking, skiing, doing yoga, biking, making soap, and caring for her bees.

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