

## Orla Bannan

### Policy Manager for State Policy and Engagement



Orla Bannan is the policy manager for state policy and engagement for Western Resource Advocates (WRA). She leads the team on developing and implementing a key set of conservation strategies at the state and local level. She identifies emerging issues and builds and maintains relationships with many decision makers to educate them about the economic and environmental benefits of water conservation, stream protection, and funding for conservation.

Bannan also helps develop and advocate for policy and programs that will protect and improve Western rivers, including working on the Colorado River Basin Interim Guidelines and Drought Contingency Plans. She approaches each challenge with a determination for climate resiliency, inclusivity, and a sustainable future for all our

communities. She joined WRA as the strategic engagement manager for the Healthy Rivers team in 2017 and was promoted to her current role in January 2024.

A lawyer by training, Bannan began her career in private practice as a transactional lawyer – first in Australia and then in the United States. She worked at a large law firm in New York on real estate transactions for many years and then transitioned to an in-house counsel role with Vail Resorts in Colorado. Here, she worked on a wide variety of environmental, water, and land use issues related to ski area operations on public and private lands. She also served as the lead lawyer on mixed-use resort development approvals, including land acquisition, title and zoning restrictions, and extensive negotiations with governmental authorities.

Bannan’s career experiences inspired her to pursue a role where she could be more intentional in her ability to protect our natural resources and address climate change – both vital elements of human lives and healthy ecosystems. She is also deeply passionate about protecting human rights. Early in her career, she spent time with human rights organizations, providing input as a contributing author to two books on the topic. She pulls from this experience now to center the need for fair and equitable access to the natural environment.

Bannan has always been drawn to the outdoors and wild places. Now, the work she does at WRA is critical to ensuring that everyone can live in a sustainable way and cherish nature. She most enjoys witnessing the collective impact that WRA has in moving forward with practical, effective solutions to immediate problems – and her ability to contribute in meaningful ways to protect our rivers and water resources and allow our communities to thrive.

During her time at WRA, Bannan has been instrumental in advancing outstanding waters designations to protect water of high quality and exceptional recreational and ecological value from future pollution due to development, mining, oil and gas, and other uses. In 2022, she was part of a coalition that, after three dedicated years, secured the protection of 25 streams covering over 520 miles in southwest Colorado. Additionally, she worked to mobilize support for the Colorado River District 2020 7A measure to generate \$5 million a year to support healthy rivers, local agriculture, watershed health, and water quality in the 15 counties that make up the Colorado River District.

Bannan received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Bachelor of Laws from the University of Sydney. She is also a LEED accredited professional. She lives in Boulder, Colo. with her husband and loving, yet opinionated, cat, where she enjoys participating in triathlons and endurance events, back country and resort skiing, exploring the Interior West, and traveling to new places.

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