

## Chelsea Benjamin Healthy Rivers Fellow



Chelsea Benjamin is a healthy rivers fellow at Western Resource Advocates (WRA). In this role, she advances water conservation initiatives at local and state levels to build community resilience to increasingly variable water supplies in the face of drought and climate change.

Benjamin conducts research to develop and evaluate state-level municipal conservation policy initiatives. She collaborates with partners in Colorado and Utah to support local governments in integrating water and land use planning to realize their water efficiency, smart growth, watershed health, and drought resilience goals through interactive Growing Water Smart

workshops. She also provides technical assistance to communities implementing land use and water planning integration projects.

Benjamin's policy research informs water conservation practices throughout the West. In 2022, she authored a WRA report highlighting the benefits and drawbacks of artificial turf. Artificial landscaping has become increasingly popular as communities seek low-water alternatives to lawns. In her report, she found that artificial turf can in fact worsen the West's water challenges by requiring large amounts of water for cooling on hot days, increasing stormwater runoff, hindering groundwater recharge, and leaching harmful chemicals. She recommended that communities instead consider landscaping with native and drought-tolerant plants to conserve water and provide other environmental benefits. Her report was featured on a podcast, where it caught the attention of a planning commissioner in Salt Lake City who presented her findings to the city's planning commission, which made recommendations to ban artificial turf in the city's landscaping code.

Prior to joining WRA in 2022, Benjamin worked with NOAA's National Integrated Drought Information System to survey Western land and water planners on their drought information needs. She also worked with Colorado State Representative Lisa Cutter on water-related legislation during the 2022 legislative session.

Benjamin is certified as a Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper. She also serves on the newsletter committee at Colorado Waterwise, a professional society for water utilities and water professionals in Colorado. She obtained a Bachelor of Science in International Studies with an Environmental track at the New College of Florida and went on to receive a Masters of the Environment from the University of Colorado Boulder with a specialization in Environmental Policy.

Inspired by her father who works to expand access to electric bicycles, Benjamin pursued a career that benefits the environment. A Colorado resident, she enjoys hiking, travelling, and studying foreign languages. Her love of the outdoors has fueled her passion for protecting the West's natural resources and beauty for future generations.

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