THE STATE OF RECYCLING & COMPOSTING IN COLORADO

COLLECTIVELY BUILDING TOWARD A CIRCULAR COLORADO

2025

9th edition

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2025 STATE OF RECYCLING & COMPOSTING IN COLORADO

Collectively Building Toward a Circular Colorado

November 2025
9th Annual

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Eco-Cycle

Eco-Cycle is a Zero Waste pioneer and one of the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit recyclers. Eco-Cycle innovates, implements, and advocates for local and global Zero Waste solutions to foster a more regenerative, equitable, and climate-resilient future. For more information, visit ecocycle.org.

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STATE OF RECYCLING & COMPOSTING IN COLORADO

INTRODUCTION

COLORADO: MOVING FROM A LAGGARD TO A LEADER

Over the past year, even as the federal government has cut back on support for environmental initiatives, Colorado continues to forge its own path toward Zero Waste. When Eco-Cycle and CoPIRG first published this report nine years ago, Colorado communities lagged behind the national recycling rate, lacking both funding and a unified vision for recycling and composting. Today, the state is building momentum: cities are implementing policies and programs, as well as building infrastructure, to increase their diversion rates; an $18 million state grant program continues to empower local innovation as well as provide free technical assistance to municipalities to facilitate improvements; and large recycling businesses and communities are making major investments in forward-thinking recycling infrastructure in the state. Colorado's Producer Responsibility for packaging and paper law is set to expand recycling to 500,000 additional households, with the goal of recycling over 400,000 tons of packaging—more than twice what we currently recycle—by 2030.[1]

While the overall state waste diversion rate of 15.7% remains around half the national average, there is good news to report on the amount of organic material diverted from landfills.[2] Data from the state shows the diversion of woody materials (e.g., yard trimmings like tree branches and wildfire mitigation materials, pallets, and clean lumber from construction sites) has increased by nearly 125,000 tons in 2024, **which is a 50% increase over 2023.**[3] This increase means that Colorado is diverting more organic materials overall from landfills than in previous years, and with the expansion and addition of facilities to process food scraps and yard trimmings into compost, digestate, mulch, and biochar, we are on track to continue this positive trend. Diverting organic materials from landfills is an essential climate solution.

Landfilling organic material creates methane gas, a greenhouse gas over 80 times more potent than CO_2 in the short term, and the application of mulch, biochar, digestate, and compost on soil creates healthier soils that are more resilient to drought and floods and can actually sequester carbon.[4]

BUILDING A MODEL OF CIRCULAR CHANGE

This progress represents more than the adoption of isolated programs or policies—it's a fundamental, intentional redesign of how our entire production and consumption system operates. We are shifting from a linear "take, make, waste" model to a circular system that prioritizes protecting natural resources and preventing pollution by design.

Our Current Linear System ("Take, Make, Waste"):

- **TAKES** natural resources from the earth—often through extractive, energy-intensive, and polluting processes.
- **MAKES** products, often using toxic chemicals or polluting methods designed for short lifespans or single-use.
- **WASTES** those resources after brief use, destroying the value of extracted natural resources in landfills or incinerators.

This linear system is broken. It relies on the false assumption that the planet's resources are infinite and fuels both pollution and climate change. Approximately 42% of US greenhouse gas emissions are tied to the energy used to produce, process, transport, and dispose of the goods we use and the food we eat. We cannot continue to extract, make, and discard as if there are no limits.

DISRUPTING THE LINEAR SYSTEM

To build a circular future, we must disrupt the linear system—redesigning it to operate within the limits of our planet. Each stage offers an opportunity for change. We need to:

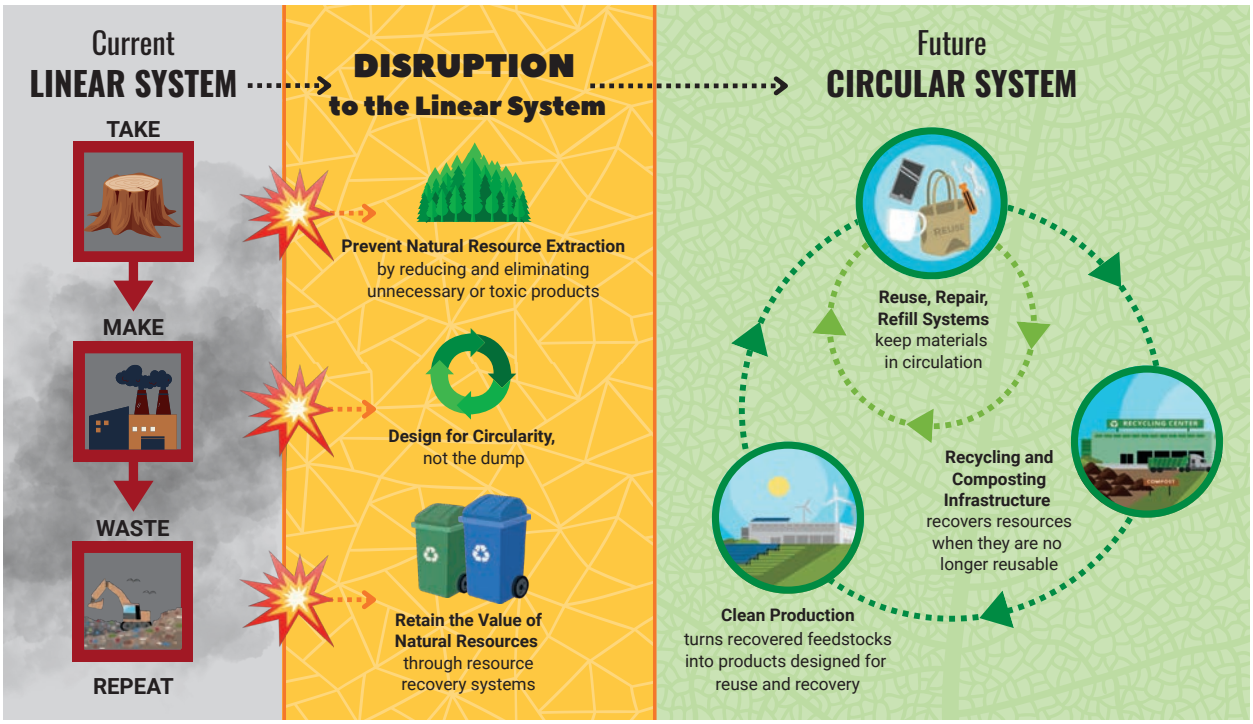
- **Rethink "Take" (extraction)**: Evaluate where we are using natural resources unnecessarily or inefficiently. Eliminate wasteful, disposable, or toxic products, and replace virgin materials with recovered ones.
- **Redesign "Make" (production)**: Plan for circularity from the start. Use recovered materials and design products and packaging to be durable, repairable, and reusable.
- **Reimagine "Waste" (disposal)**: Keep materials circulating through reuse, repair, recycling, and composting—making recovery the default, not the exception.

By disrupting the linear system at every stage, we create the conditions for a circular system that protects natural resources, reduces pollution, and keeps materials in productive use.

DEVELOPING A CIRCULAR SYSTEM

- **Designs out waste** and toxicity, prioritizing clean production and safe material cycles.
- **Reduces extraction** of virgin resources by using existing recycled materials.
- **Keeps materials in use** for as long as possible through reuse and repair.
- **Recovers value** through composting or recycling—returning nutrients to the soil and materials to the economy.
- Builds systems and habits that make **reuse, repair, and responsible recovery** the easiest and most natural choices.

A circular economy also creates green jobs, resilient local supply chains, and healthier soils—transforming what was once discarded into the foundation of a more sustainable Colorado. This is the future we are working toward: a resilient, circular Colorado for the benefit of people and the planet.



CHANGES ARE HAPPENING HERE — AND THEY'RE ALL CONNECTED

In past editions, we have reported diversion rates for municipalities and counties; however, it is difficult to compare apples to apples by creating a ranking system, since communities report their data in different ways. Fortunately, with Producer Responsibility coming online starting in 2026, we expect more consistent data reporting across the state. Therefore, this year, we are not reporting on comparative diversion rates across multiple communities, but instead are highlighting specific advancements communities have made toward achieving their Zero Waste goals. While many Colorado communities and the state as a whole are implementing new and often unique policies and programs, it is the people behind those efforts who are powering the change. In this report, we are excited to highlight individual champions to show that **change happens person by person, community by community**. From the classroom to the capitol, local efforts drive progress—and this interconnected leadership is why Colorado is seeing the growth of reuse, recycling, and composting jobs and businesses, as well as increases in recycling and composting materials.

POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND INFRASTRUCTURE ARE BUILDING BLOCKS OF CHANGE

While different education efforts, programs, and policies may seem disconnected and disparate—such as the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act, the Producer Responsibility program, or organic waste diversion—each effort contributes to a larger circular system. Solutions such as banning unrecyclable plastics, passing Universal Recycling Ordinances, and expanding composting reinforce one another, multiplying their impact across communities and sectors. The impacts of these policies affect communities near and far by reducing natural resource consumption and pollution at the sources of extraction, strengthening local supply chains with recycled materials, and reducing and sequestering greenhouse gases. While many waste reduction and diversion programs start as voluntary or pilot efforts to prove concepts, they build toward the passage of local or state policies that create certainty about the continuation of the desired action and promote equity by setting consistent expectations for all groups to take action and/or receive services.

Colorado's journey from a recycling laggard to a leader in waste reduction and diversion is ongoing, and this report spotlights the network of communities, businesses, and champions building our resilient, circular future together.

COLORADO'S MOMENTUM TOWARD CIRCULARITY: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The vision of circularity is driving impactful policy.

Colorado and its communities are advancing policies—including Producer Responsibility for packaging and paper, battery stewardship, Universal Zero Waste Ordinances, organics diversion requirements, and volume-based pricing—that align incentives and expand access to recycling and organics diversion.

- In 2024, **Longmont achieved a commercial waste diversion rate increase from 35% to 59%** after implementing its Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO), a model of how policy, local businesses, and public education can work together to create measurable results.[5]
- In 2024, following Colorado's Producer Responsibility programs for paint and packaging and paper, the State adopted a new battery stewardship law (SB25-163). Starting in 2028, battery producers will fund the collection, recycling, and proper disposal of small- and medium-format batteries including button, AAA, D-cell, rechargeable power-tool batteries, and e-bike batteries.

Organics are being treated as a resource rather than waste.

State and local actions are scaling composting, mulching, and biochar to build healthy soils and cut methane.

- In 2024, **Aspen's new Organic Waste Ordinance** that requires food establishments to have an organics hauler has resulted in a 223% increase in **food scraps being composted** (from 804 tons in 2023 to 2,600 tons in 2024).[6]
- In 2024, Colorado expanded programs and added increased capacity to divert woody material from landfills, achieving a 50% increase in woody material diversion—**from 250,000 to 375,000 tons in one year**.[7]

Infrastructure is scaling statewide.

New and upgraded recycling materials recovery facilities (MRFs), organics processing capacity at multiple scales, and rural collection pilots are closing service gaps.

- In 2024, **Denver's** residential compost program expanded hauling services citywide to **serve 75,000 homes**, increasing **organics diversion by 55%**.[8]
- The **City of Grand Junction is building a regional MRF** that will significantly build recycling capacity on the Western Slope.[9]

Deconstruction and reuse are replacing demolition and landfilling.

Local policies and hubs are recovering high-value materials, supporting local jobs, and reducing construction and demolition disposal.

- In 2024, **Perks Deconstruction**, located in Commerce City, **recovered 261,857 pounds of reusable building materials and recycled 838,140 pounds** from 208 deconstruction projects in 2024 alone.[10]
- Since the **City of Boulder's** deconstruction ordinance took effect in July 2020, the program has **diverted over 105,000 tons from the landfill** (76% of all materials from buildings taken down within city limits).[11]

RETHINKING THE CONCEPT OF "WASTE"

Creating a circular economy—where valuable natural resources are conserved and continuously recovered through recycling and composting—is, at its heart, not about "managing waste," but about responsible resource management that protects both people and the planet.

When we view waste as an inevitable part of modern life, our "solutions" tend to focus on making it disappear—burying, burning, or exporting it—rather than preventing it in the first place. This mindset drives a linear system built on extraction and disposal. But when we shift our lens and recognize that the health of our communities, habitats, and future generations depends on how wisely we use the planet's finite resources, a different kind of system becomes possible—one designed for recovery, regeneration, and resilience.

Like "net zero emissions" and "100% renewable energy," "Zero Waste" is an aspirational goal to work toward. In service to circularity, Zero Waste reframes how we understand and manage Earth's resources in a way that is both sustainable and equitable. A key step toward that goal is changing how we talk about recyclable and compostable materials.

The term "waste" assumes that a material is no longer valuable. Yet commonly recycled and composted materials—empty aluminum cans, food scraps, cardboard boxes—are the products of valuable and often finite natural resources, energy-intensive manufacturing processes, and global supply chains.

Empty beverage containers and cardboard boxes are not "packaging waste" but recyclable materials that are the feedstock for new products. Banana peels and yard trimmings are not "green waste" but "organic materials" that are the feedstock for nutrient-rich soil amendments. These materials contain value that can be recovered; they only become "waste" when they are lost from the economy—buried in landfills or burned in incinerators.

When we view our discards as valuable, we shift the systems around them from extraction and disposal to renewal and stewardship. Our entire built and manufactured environment is made from natural resources. When we reduce, reuse, repair, recycle, and compost, we are not only preventing the environmental issues caused by "waste" generation, we are part of the solution by contributing valuable resources to a sustainable, local, and resilient circular economy.

THE Rs: KEY CONCEPTS TO EMBRACE AS WE DRIVE OUR LOCAL ECONOMIES TOWARD CIRCULARITY

REDUCE the need for a product or its packaging in the first place. This R is the highest priority in the Zero Waste hierarchy. If we don't make a product, we don't need to extract natural resources and can avoid the associated negative environmental and social impacts.

REDESIGN products to use fewer resources, few-to-no toxins, and higher recycled content. Design should prioritize longevity of use, repair, and ultimately recycling.

REUSE already extracted resources, keeping materials and products in circulation for as long as possible. Establishing reuse systems can help eliminate the need for single-use items.

REFILL reusable containers. Rather than using single-use items (even those that are recyclable or compostable), durable, reusable containers are refilled for everything from condiments and milk in schools to reuse/refill to-go containers at restaurants and returnable/washable containers at reuse/refill stores.

REPAIR products and keep them in use. For some products, this requires changing systems to guarantee the right to repair products.

RECYCLE transparently and authentically, capturing products at the end of their useful lives and turning these materials into new products that can be recycled yet again. Composting is essentially the recycling of organic matter, including food scraps and yard trimmings.

REGENERATE soils that have been depleted by overuse and conventional agricultural practices by applying recycled organic material such as compost, biochar, and mulch.

BUILD RESILIENCE within our urban landscapes using nature-based climate solutions so that we and our local ecosystems can better withstand the impacts of climate change.

BUILDING LOCAL HEALTHY SOILS THROUGH

ORGANICS DIVERSION

There's nothing more circular than the natural process of decomposition, in which plants and animals and the products produced from them—food scraps, yard trimmings, wood, cardboard, and other paper and fiber-based materials—break down and return the basic beneficial elements of life back to the soil to grow and support new plants and animals.

This cycle is disrupted when organic materials break down in landfills anaerobically (without oxygen) and generate methane, a greenhouse gas that is over 80 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the earth's atmosphere when measured over a 20-year period.[12] At the same time, topsoil on agricultural lands where our food is grown is rapidly being depleted and pumped full of unsustainable petrochemical fertilizers. However, communities and composters of all sizes across Colorado are actively repairing this broken, linear system by returning the valuable nutrients from food scraps and yard trimmings back into the soil through organics diversion programs and the application of mulch, biochar, and finished compost to soils. Closing the loop on organic materials—from soil back to soil—is one of the most environmentally beneficial actions Coloradans can take.

Colorado diverting more woody material

In 2024, **Colorado diverted almost 375,000 tons of woody material, nearly 125,000 tons more than in 2023**.[13] While a notable step forward, even with this increase in diversion of woody material, we still bury 2 million tons of food scraps and yard trimmings in Colorado landfills every year.[14] Organic materials, including food scraps and yard trimmings, comprise approximately 37% of Colorado's overall waste stream, which presents a tremendous opportunity to increase diversion and achieve resulting environmental and economic benefits.[15]

The linear "take-make-waste" system treats organic materials as waste to be discarded, rather than a circular system where organic materials are a valuable and regenerative resource. There are several methods for processing diverted organics for beneficial use that are appropriate

for different material streams and desired outputs, including biochar, mulch, digestate, and compost. By diverting organic materials from landfills and turning them into these products we not only prevent climate-warming emissions, but also create soil amendments that retain more water, help grow more nutrient-dense crops, and pull down carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to be stored beneficially in the ground.

Keeping the value of compost local and "down on the farm"

The circular economy for organic materials has the unique ability to be a hyperlocal system—plants can be composted back into the soil at the same house, garden, or farm where they were grown. While municipal curbside or drop-off programs have often relied on regional composting facilities, there is great value in a diversified approach that connects all participants—residents, schools, and businesses generating organic materials—with a distributed network of processors of all sizes. This **multi-scale "Local Compost Network" (LCN)** includes the smallest backyard composters, local on-farm and on-site composting operations, municipally run mulch piles, entrepreneurial haulers and processors serving communities, and large-scale regional compost manufacturers and prioritizes clean feedstocks for high-quality compost production as well as soil application back in the communities from which they came. It is an integrated model that links organics collection and processing at multiple scales into a connected network that keeps nutrients circulating locally. Colorado's depleted soils and large agricultural community populations could benefit greatly from following a multi-scale LCN model.

Andy Pemberton of Pemberton Farms in Boulder, which is a participant in Eco-Cycle's Farmer First community composting program—part of a model LCN—that diverts the cleanest organic discards from the community to compost production at local regenerative farms.

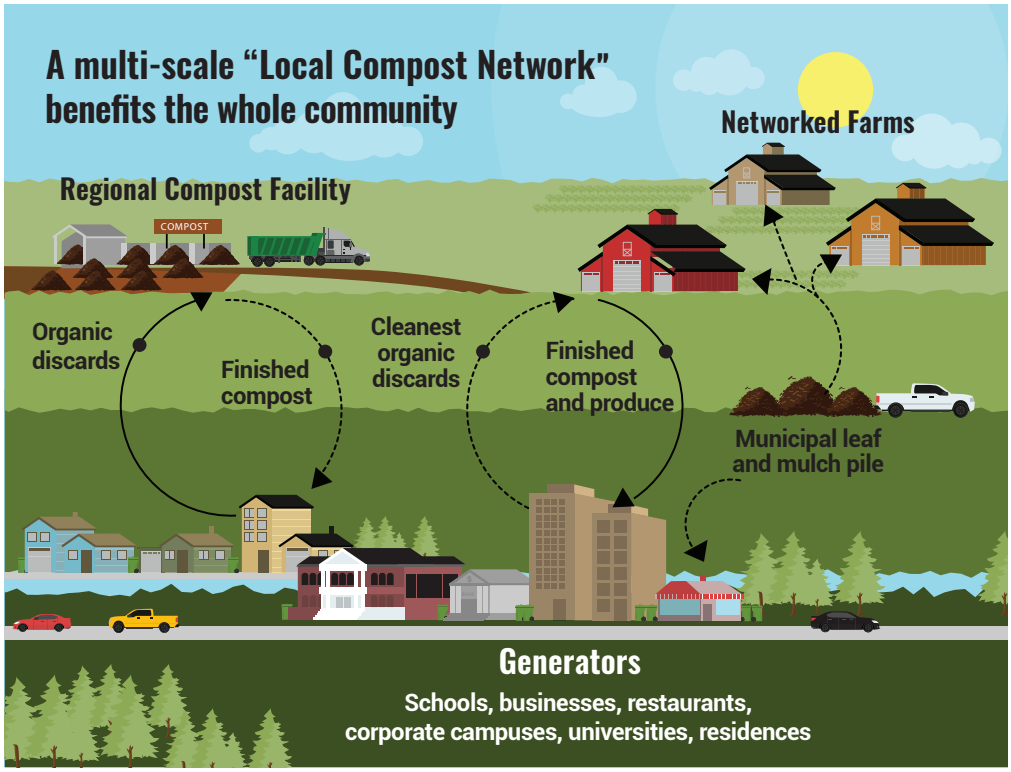
Due to the dedication of compost champions across the state, Colorado has made considerable progress in advancing organics diversion and elements of an LCN at multiple scales, particularly through infrastructure, financial investment, supportive policies, and entrepreneurship. By updating regulations over the past few years, Colorado has created a path that has reduced barriers to starting organics processing facilities that can scale over time to achieve greater organics diversion and processing (detailed in the 2023 State of Recycling and Composting Report). The State highlighted the need for organics diversion and use of finished compost in the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap 2.0 and organics management plans. The State's Organics Management Plan (2022) and the Organics Diversion Study (2024) provide recommendations for state and local policies as well as other tools to build up infrastructure and services for collecting and processing organics. Additionally, the Circular Colorado Communities (C3) Enterprise invests in organics diversion programs and provides technical assistance to communities to pursue organics diversion.

Implementing the actions recommended by the state organics plans would dramatically increase the current organics diversion rate from roughly 10% to 60% by 2036.[16] This vision for a future where Colorado's organic materials are turned into valuable soil amendments at multiple scales and applied to soils to build soil health can become a reality through expanding convenient access to composting, accessible outreach and education, local entrepreneurship, and policy advocacy—made possible by actions from elected officials, municipal staff, entrepreneurs, the farming community, and engaged residents.

MULTI-SCALE LOCAL COMPOST NETWORK (LCN)

A community-based framework for turning local organics into living soil

A Local Compost Network (LCN) is a decentralized, community-based system for managing organics close to where they're generated. It connects composting at multiple scales—backyards, farms, on-site at institutions or businesses, municipally run mulch piles, and regional facilities—into a network that transforms organic discards into healthy soil, reduces emissions, and strengthens community resilience.



The importance of addressing food scraps for the climate

Diverting organic materials from landfills has a measurable impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Landfills are the third-largest source of human-created methane emissions.[17] The climate impacts of landfilled food scraps are especially high. A 2024 report from the EPA found that food waste was responsible for 58% of methane emissions from landfills, and that 834 metric tons of CO_2 equivalent are emitted per 1,000 tons of food waste landfilled.[18] That means that every 1,000 tons of organic material diverted from landfills has the equivalent climate benefit of taking 212 cars off the road for a year.[19] The combined amount of food scraps currently going to landfill and the potential benefit of diverting that material makes reducing food waste one of the most impactful climate solutions, according to Project Drawdown.[20] Further, the State of California found that investing in recycling programs and organics diversion programs are the top two most cost-effective climate solutions municipalities can undertake.[21] As communities in Colorado work to expand local organics diversion, they are implementing strategies that have significant potential to reduce landfill methane emissions.

Tackling landfill methane emissions in Colorado

Preventing future landfill emissions through organics diversion is a key strategy in Colorado's efforts to address climate change at both the state and local levels. In 2025, the state has been undertaking a rulemaking effort to minimize landfill emissions, a crucial component of the larger organics diversion and air quality puzzles. While the updated regulations will not be finalized until mid-December, environmental groups have organized statewide to advocate for a nation-leading policy. The proposed rule includes lower thresholds for requiring installation of landfill gas collection and control systems, stricter leak-monitoring requirements, and requirements to repair gas leaks. **Eco-Cycle**, along with allied organizations including **GreenLatinos**, **Environmental Defense Fund**, **Healthy Air and Water Colorado**, and **Full Circle Future**, among several others, has advocated for a strong rule that also encourages the diversion of organic material from landfills to avoid methane emissions altogether.

According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) lists of registered landfills and composting facilities, 9 of Colorado's 55 landfills already operate Class III compost sites, roughly 10 other landfills operate in counties that have active Class III compost facilities, and many others are in counties that have smaller composting facilities.[22] Class III sites are allowed to process all types of organic feedstock (vegetative, food, manure, biosolids, etc.) and do not have a regulatory cap on the amount of material they actively process. Eco-Cycle and our coalition partners will continue to advocate for new or expanded organics diversion from landfills as a means to meet stronger emissions thresholds, since diverting organics would prevent methane from being created in the first place. We encourage smaller landfills, in particular, to utilize resources such as the Municipal Composting Toolkit and the Colorado Organics Infrastructure Toolkit, the Colorado Composting Council, and C3 funds to meet methane thresholds by turning organics into compost and mulch products, which can be sold.

Healthy soils and climate resiliency

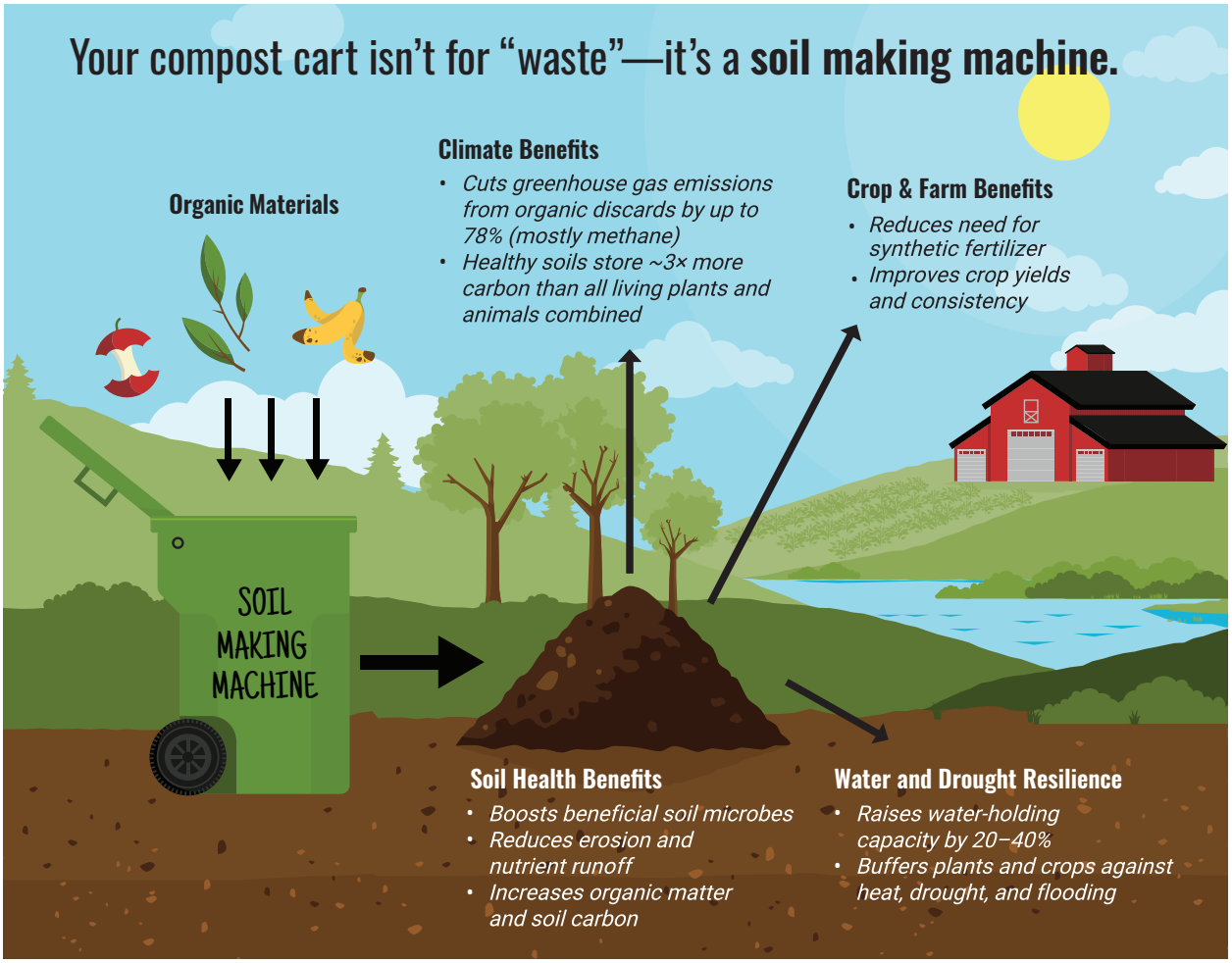
Diverting organic matter from landfills through composting, mulching, creating biochar, or anaerobic digestion yields powerful soil amendments that deliver additional climate benefits. **Benefits include rebuilding soil health, making soil more resilient to flooding and drought, and, importantly, increasing the sequestering of atmospheric carbon in soils.** Estimates suggest that soil stores roughly three times more carbon than all living plants and animals combined.[23] Studies have shown that applying finished compost to soil has long-term sequestration benefits and can increase below-ground carbon content by 50% more than soil that has not had compost applied.[24]

Since applying finished compost improves the water-holding capacity of soil, it becomes more resistant to drought, erosion, and flooding. For every 1,000 tons of diverted food scraps and yard trimmings, 1.2 million gallons of water is saved, which is the equivalent of eight Colorado households' worth of water use per year.[25]

Colorado's Statewide Organics Management Plan found that the "untapped demand for finished compost is potentially five times greater than the amount of compost being produced today."[26] This demand for compost creates an opportunity to reap tremendous carbon sequestration benefits if communities across the state can develop the systems needed to create more compost from our discarded organics—an approach that would also reduce landfill methane emissions. Creating circular, local compost systems helps Colorado become a more resilient state.

THE BENEFITS OF USING COMPOST

Your compost cart isn't for waste—it's part of a vital solution for our soils, our climate, and community resilience. Applying finished compost on land restores nutrients to Colorado's depleted soils, helping them hold more water, resist drought and heat, store carbon, and support local food systems. Composting transforms our scraps into one of the most powerful tools for climate and community resilience.

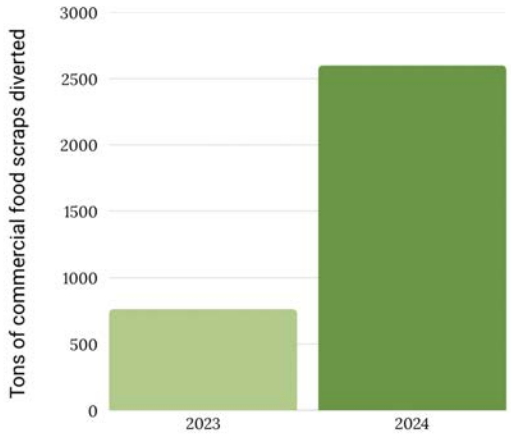


COLORADO ORGANICS MODELS

Organics diversion ordinances are showing positive results.

- Since the **City of Aspen's** Organic Waste Ordinance took effect in October 2023, all establishments with a retail food license have registered with an organics hauler, resulting in a significant increase in composting. **Organics diversion increased from 804 tons of food scraps diverted in 2023 to 2,600 tons in 2024**, which coincided with a decrease in the number of tons buried at the Pitkin County Landfill.[27] The second phase of the ordinance, which goes into effect in 2026, will require all multifamily buildings and commercial properties to offer access to organics diversion. In 2028, the ordinance will require organics diversion citywide. The success of this ordinance is made possible through the City's support, which includes offering compost bins, centralized drop-off locations, educational materials, and wildlife-resistant outdoor bins.

Aspen Commercial Food Scrap Diversion



Source: City of Aspen, 2025

The City of Aspen saw a significant increase in commercial food scrap diversion by implementing an Organic Waste Ordinance starting in October 2023. Food scraps diverted from businesses went from 760 tons in 2023 to 2,600 tons in 2024, nearly an increase of 350%.

- The **Glenwood Springs** City Council voted to ban yard trimmings from the **South Canyon Landfill** starting in the summer of 2025. While many local residents and businesses are complying by diverting yard trimmings to the composting program, some are taking yard clippings to nearby landfills where they will be buried rather than separating them from trash to be mulched or composted.[28] The diversion requirement is a success for South Canyon, which is expanding the landfill's usable lifespan and avoiding methane emissions by keeping yard trimmings out of the landfill. The fact that some people are dodging the requirement by taking organic materials to other landfills demonstrates a larger need for coordinated or statewide policies.

Public-private partnership aims to increase commercial composting

The **City of Fort Collins** is partnering with **Compost Queen** to implement a Food Waste Composting Pilot Program for residences and businesses. The program is funded through the $0.10 paper checkout bag fee (which is aligned with the state's Plastic Pollution Reduction Act) collected as part of the City's Disposable Bag Ordinance. The pilot program will provide 12 months of subsidized compost service from Compost Queen, while gathering data on adoption rates, pricing models, collection volumes, processing needs, and other relevant information. **The project is expected to divert up to 165 tons of food scraps from the landfill over its 12-month run**. Data gathered during the program will help determine operational needs for consideration of city-wide composting options.[29]

Colorado saw the addition of several new in-vessel composters this year.

Because in-vessel composting units don't smell, they can be a great solution for areas concerned about wildlife, urban areas, and schools or large business campuses (for example, **Western Colorado University** in Gunnison has had an in-vessel unit since 2019).

In-vessel composting unit at the Nederland transfer station

- **Boulder County** added an in-vessel composting unit to the Nederland transfer station. Boulder County opted for this solution to process food scraps and wood chips from their slash (which includes woody materials, like branches, often removed as part of fire mitigation efforts) because processing on-site in Nederland reduces concerns with safety and hauling emissions from trucking organic materials through Boulder Canyon. The County charges people to drop off food scraps and plans to provide the finished compost for free to local residents.[30]
- **Compost Colorado** added two units to their facility at the National Western Complex. **Compost Colorado is processing 50 yards per week** through their new continuous-flow in-vessel compost units, producing about 40 yards per month of screened compost for soil restoration efforts. Since starting operations in May 2025, they have donated about 10 yards of compost to the Globeville, Elyria, and Swansea community where they are located. They also provide finished compost to individual and business members who pay for collection services and hope to begin selling finished compost soon.[31]

Curbside collections diverting significantly more material in Denver

The **City and County of Denver** made progress in creating circular systems for both residential and commercial discards this year, especially in organics. As part of the City's Expanded Waste Services program to revamp curbside collection service, Denver's Solid Waste Management division completed the rollout of the citywide curbside compost expansion. The costs for curbside

organics collection service are now covered by the pay-as-you-throw pricing system for trash collection. There are 75,000 participating customers, and **year-to-date organics diversion tonnage is up by 55%** due to increased participation.[32] Additionally, nearly three years after 71% of Denver voters approved the Waste No More ballot initiative, Denver's City Council approved amendments needed to implement the policy. New requirements for recycling and composting at businesses, multifamily housing buildings, permitted events, and construction and demolition sites will go into effect on September 1, 2026.[33]

Local closed-loop program creating compost on farms from school and restaurant food scraps

In Boulder County, **Eco-Cycle**—working with local regenerative farmers and community partners including Green Star Schools, restaurants, and businesses—created the Farmer First Compost Program, a closed-loop model that diverts clean, food-only scraps from school cafeterias and other local generators, along with fall leaves from municipal drop-off programs, to on-farm composting. Rather than hauling organics 52 miles to a regional facility, Eco-Cycle collects and delivers these clean, high-value materials to regenerative farmers who receive training and infrastructure support to compost them on-site and apply the finished compost to their fields—improving soil health, water retention, and drought resilience while storing more carbon. The program keeps nutrients local and grows nutritious food with food scraps returning to participating partners. It also reduces emissions by avoiding the need to truck organic material to faraway composting facilities and then haul finished compost back to farms. The Farmer First Compost Program demonstrates the value of a multi-scale Local Compost Network—a scalable, nature-based climate solution for diverting organics and strengthening community resilience and food systems.

Boulder chooses composting over landfilling or chemical herbicides to address invasive weeds

In fall 2025, the **City of Boulder**, with support from **Eco-Cycle**, began a pilot on-site composting project focused on diverting the invasive weed Eurasian Watermilfoil that is populating the Boulder Reservoir and degrading recreation experiences. With minimal training and readily available equipment, City staff are producing high-quality compost from material that would otherwise be considered waste. Eco-Cycle tracks the pile's core temperature and recommends watering and turning schedules, while City staff operate the machinery and carry out the plan developed collaboratively between the two partners. All material in the pile reaches temperatures sufficient to decompose seeds and plant parts capable of reproduction, controlling the invasive weed pressure without the need for herbicides. By maintaining adequate oxygen levels within the compost piles, the project transforms a noxious material into high-quality compost used on-site to build healthy soil. This pilot demonstrates that on-site composting is a viable diversion strategy with the added benefit of soil building—not only for farms, but also for parks, open spaces, and landscaping projects.

On-site composting of invasive weeds at the Boulder Reservoir

Colorado Compost Champions

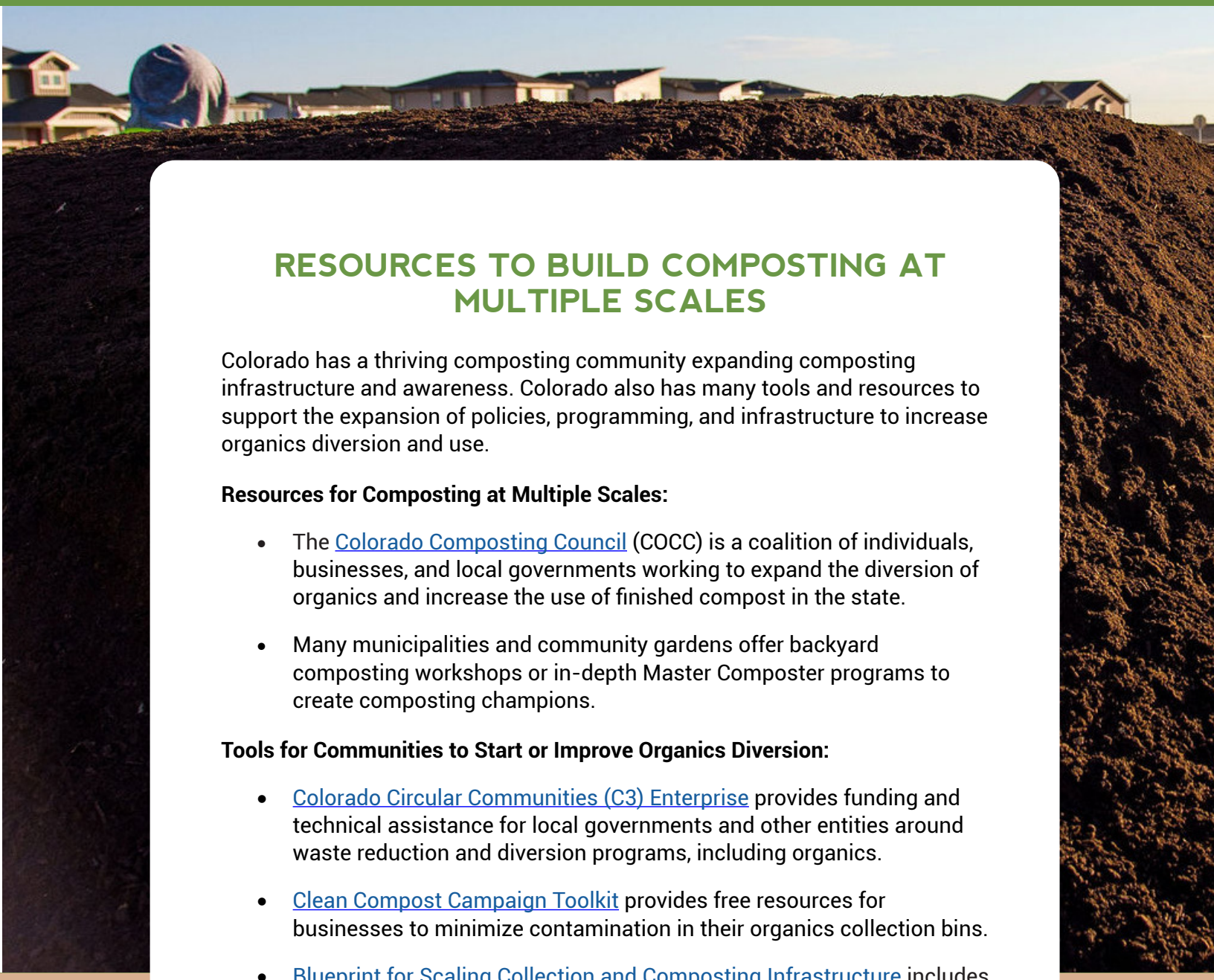
Meet a couple of the many champions driving Colorado's circular solutions for organics.

Jimena Baldino
City of Aspen's Sustainability Specialist

"Waste diversion has been a passion of mine for many years. I remember being a kid and seeing the contamination on local beaches and worrying about the wildlife. I'm proud to lead waste diversion practices in a world-renowned tourist town where tourism and nature coexist—and where many other towns look to us as a model." By implementing multiple programs, such as special drop-off opportunities and the organic waste diversion program, and by creating and expanding bilingual education and outreach to both residents and tourists, Aspen's approach to sustainability, waste reduction, and diversion has made it a true leader in the state and nation.

Dan Matsch,
Retired Eco-Cycle Director of Composting and Carbon Farming and active composter and farmer

"As a local organic farmer on marginal land in the 1990s, I was entirely dependent on the health of my soil to grow successful crops, and I was keenly aware of the soil nutrients I was mining and exporting every time I harvested. My food scrap composting journey started when I became determined to find a way to 'close the loop' and cycle nutrients back onto my land, ideally with food scraps from the same customers that I sold produce to at farmers markets. It has been an amazing privilege in the intervening years to help start some of the first food scrap collection programs in Colorado, foster growth in commercial composting across the state, and, most dear to me, empower start-up composters to connect directly with local farmers to build soil health using compost made from clean food scraps."



RESOURCES TO BUILD COMPOSTING AT MULTIPLE SCALES

Colorado has a thriving composting community expanding composting infrastructure and awareness. Colorado also has many tools and resources to support the expansion of policies, programming, and infrastructure to increase organics diversion and use.

Resources for Composting at Multiple Scales:

- The Colorado Composting Council (COCC) is a coalition of individuals, businesses, and local governments working to expand the diversion of organics and increase the use of finished compost in the state.
- Many municipalities and community gardens offer backyard composting workshops or in-depth Master Composter programs to create composting champions.

Tools for Communities to Start or Improve Organics Diversion:

- Colorado Circular Communities (C3) Enterprise provides funding and technical assistance for local governments and other entities around waste reduction and diversion programs, including organics.
- Clean Compost Campaign Toolkit provides free resources for businesses to minimize contamination in their organics collection bins.
- Blueprint for Scaling Collection and Composting Infrastructure includes organics policies, infrastructure considerations, contracting best practices, and customizable outreach materials aimed at helping communities identify the right steps to begin or expand organics diversion in their areas.
- Colorado's Statewide Organics Management Plan, diversion study, and toolkit provide an overview of organics diversion programs in Colorado, the impact of organics diversion, the case for using finished compost in the state, and policy recommendations for the State and local governments.
- Eco-Cycle's Zero Waste Schools Activity Guide for schools and camps provides tips and plans to educate and engage students in Zero Waste activities, including lesson plans featuring composting.

ORGANICS: LOCAL POLICY AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Implementing supportive policies and programs accelerates the transition to a local circular economy for organics.** Composting can be impactful at multiple scales, including educating backyard composters, collaborating with regenerative farmers and entrepreneurial compost businesses, and leveraging new state compost facility regulations to expand local compost infrastructure.

2. **Communicate the benefits of composting.** One of the first steps that local governments can take is to communicate the numerous environmental and business benefits of composting and circularity. A key education component is to ensure the public understands how the material diverted to the composting stream becomes a beneficial product that builds soil health. What goes into compost bins comes out in the compost, so we need to minimize contamination. Municipalities should consider partnering with the Master Composter program as teachers and ambassadors for successful local composting.

3. **Buy and use finished compost and mulch.** The full environmental benefits of composting are only fully realized when compost is applied to soils. Local farmers, governments, schools, businesses, and individuals can "close the loop" on organics by buying and using finished compost to amend soils in infrastructure projects and public spaces. A local government may adopt a policy that requires the use of compost and mulch in infrastructure and landscaping projects. Buying compost supports local compost businesses, which in turn leads to the development of more composting infrastructure.

4. **Reduce wasted food.** To advance organics diversion throughout a community, local governments can enact a "lead by example" internal policy that reduces overordering of food for events, ensures surplus edible food is donated, and provides compost collection access at government-operated facilities and events.

5. **Support organics diversion programs.** Organics diversion can occur at various levels, including annual leaf and yard-trimming collection events, grant-funded collection programs, weekly curbside collection of food scraps and yard trimmings, and more. Colorado communities are partnering with local businesses to haul and process organic materials and provide finished products for use in soils. As Colorado's Producer Responsibility program begins to fund recycling systems, Eco-Cycle recommends reallocating funds that communities were spending on recycling programs to support increased organics collection programs. The municipal blueprint for composting report is an excellent resource for helping local governments create a plan to take the next step toward increasing organics diversion.

6. **Pass a Universal Zero Waste Ordinance.** For communities that already have residential collection programs, a local government could design and pass a Universal Zero Waste Ordinance (sometimes called a Universal Recycling Ordinance, or URO, though some UROs only require recycling), which includes requirements for commercial food scrap generators and, in some cases, yard trimming generators (e.g., grocery stores, restaurants, landscapers) to divert organic material. The commercial sector, including restaurants and landscaping businesses, generates a significant amount of food scraps and yard trimmings that could be diverted.

ORGANICS: STATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Require organics to be diverted from landfills.** Thirty-two states have enacted policies that prohibit the disposal of yard trimmings, food scraps, or both in landfills.[34] As described in Colorado's Organics Diversion Study, prohibiting organic materials from being landfilled will dramatically reduce landfill methane emissions, create demand for compost infrastructure, and significantly increase the amount of valuable soil amendments created to rebuild soil health and resiliency.[35] While state policy would create consistency across the state, landfills can proactively implement their own diversion requirements without policy mandates.

2. **Allow CDPHE to have authority over large organic scraps generators.** Currently, CDPHE does not have the authority to require large food scrap and yard trimming generators, such as food processors or landscapers, to divert their organic materials for composting. Without such authority, the State cannot require large organic material generators to divert their organic material through donation of edible food, composting, or other means. The State can only require diversion of materials from landfills, meaning enforcement would fall entirely on haulers and landfill operators. It is much easier to ensure an entity has appropriate diversion services than it is to determine which generator illegally landfilled prohibited material once the load from multiple generators arrives at the landfill.

3. **Coordinate organics circularity efforts between state agencies.** As recommended in the Colorado Organics Diversion Study, state agencies, including the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), and the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA), should collaborate on the state's role in utilizing finished compost, mulch, and biochar. The impact of these state agencies' role in organics circularity, particularly concerning agricultural uses, can be amplified through increased collaboration.

4. **Increase the state's role in developing end markets.** Through legislation, regulation updates, or executive order, more agencies could be required to use finished compost on certain infrastructure projects, following the example in CDOT's Section 212 regulations for soil amendments.[36] Creating and growing programs like CDA's Colorado Soil Health Program helps connect the dots between locally manufactured soil amendments and agricultural end markets.[37]

CONSERVING NATURAL RESOURCES THROUGH

EXPANDED RECYCLING SYSTEMS

For a circular economy to function effectively, it requires a robust, transparent, and trustworthy recycling system. While recycling alone doesn't create a circular economy—strategies to reduce resource extraction must come first, and products must be designed for reuse, repair, and recycling into new products—it remains a crucial component of a circular system, essential for recovering materials at the end of their useful lives and returning them to circulation as new products.

Recycling decreases demand for new resources, thereby reducing the environmental damage caused by extractive industries. For example, aluminum cans and glass bottles can be recycled indefinitely, reducing the need to extract virgin resources. Recycling also saves water and energy that would otherwise be needed to manufacture new products.[38] These savings also reduce greenhouse gas emissions by as much as three tons of carbon emissions per one ton of recycled materials.[39] Saving natural resources keeps economic value circulating locally. **Colorado currently throws away an estimated $100 million worth of recyclable materials each year**.[40] By recycling, we can benefit local economies by creating jobs and preventing materials from being buried in landfills.

New policies and programs at the state and local levels promise to create dramatic improvements in access to services and processing capacity for recycling. Colorado's Producer Responsibility for Packaging and Paper program is on track to begin rolling out in 2026, growing our state's recycling systems and providing recycling access to an estimated 500,000 households that do not currently have access.[41]

Recycling is a critical part of the solution, but it must be in the context of a larger strategy that reduces waste and plastic production, invests in authentic, transparent reuse and recycling systems, and holds producers accountable for designing nontoxic, recyclable packaging that uses recycled content.

Pushing Back on False "Solutions"

Increasingly, some in the fossil fuel industry have been advocating for "advanced," "chemical," or "molecular" recycling for packaging, but these terms hide what is actually happening: the conversion of plastics into fuel. While there may be potential to use alternative processes to chemically convert hard-to-recycle plastics, such as textiles and automotive parts, back into plastics, technologies purporting to "recycle" plastic packaging through these methods have repeatedly failed to deliver promised results and instead have produced toxic pollution.[42] They peddle false solutions that only confuse consumers and deepen the public's distrust in genuine recycling methods that mechanically recover material back into supply chains. Investments in these types of technologies divert investments in true solution-oriented innovations, such as redesigns of unrecyclable packaging to make it more recyclable through proven methods, or transitions to reuse systems that eliminate single-use waste altogether.

State-Level Wins for Authentic Recycling Solutions[43]

This year, the State of Colorado rejected a loophole in the Producer Responsibility for Packaging plan that would have allowed "free allocation" methods for tracking post-consumer recycled content for plastics recycling. This misleading and unverifiable accounting scheme—championed by some in the plastics industry—would have permitted companies to claim far more plastics recycling than actually occurred, thereby misleading the public. By rejecting this loophole, the State ensured that plastics used as fuel, or converted into fuel, cannot be counted as "recycled" in Colorado. Additionally, companies will not be eligible to receive financial incentives through Colorado's Producer Responsibility program for making dishonest claims about recycled content based on these unverifiable accounting schemes.

The state also listened to community input to underscore the intent of the Producer Responsibility program to encourage producers to improve packaging designs to reduce negative impacts on public health and the environment. The state's new Producer Responsibility system will include incentives for companies to reduce packaging, design for reuse, and use more recycled materials. This approach, known as eco-modulation, utilizes financial incentives and penalties to encourage companies to adopt more sustainable packaging that incorporates higher levels of Post-Consumer Recycled (PCR) content. By including language in the state's rulemaking that aligns with the law and emphasizes the need to reduce harms on public health and the environment, the state is taking an important step toward reducing toxins in packaging.

New battery stewardship law will expand access to battery collection, reduce battery-caused fires, and recycle more valuable materials from batteries.

Colorado's new law, SB25-163, is the kind of forward-thinking policy Colorado needs as we work toward Zero Waste and the safe, responsible management of materials. The battery stewardship program, which will be overseen by CDPHE and managed by a new Battery Stewardship Organization (BSO) sets strong safety and collections benchmarks and will expand access to safe battery recycling across the state. Highlights of the law include[44]:

- Batteries collected under the program must be easily removable from devices using nothing more than a common household tool, and they include everything from button batteries, AAA, and D-cell, up to power tool and e-bike batteries.
- Based on the state's paint stewardship model, by 2028 at least one permanent drop-off site for small-format batteries will be available within 15 miles of 95% of Colorado residents. The BSO must hold at least one permanent site or an annual collection event for every 30,000 county residents.
- By 2029, there must be at least 15 permanent collection sites for medium-format batteries, with at least one in every county with a population of 150,000 or more. The BSO must hold annual collection events in counties without permanent sites.
- Consumers will not be required to pay at the point of collection, and participation by retailers, local governments, and recycling operators is voluntary.
- By requiring the BSO to reimburse local governments and their designated collection sites, the law will incentivize expansion of collection access across the state.

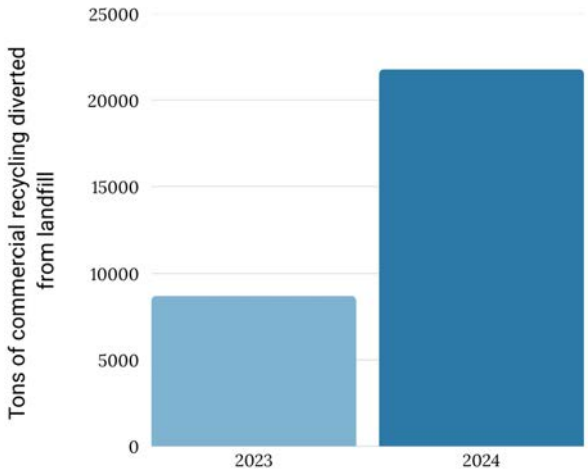
The next steps to safely and responsibly collect and recycle batteries will include adopting laws targeting large-format batteries (e.g., electric vehicles) and electronics, including those with embedded batteries (e.g., cell phones, light-up shoes, and electronic smoking devices or vapes).

COLORADO RECYCLING MODELS

Communities implementing Universal Recycling Ordinances are dramatically increasing commercial diversion.[45]

- The **City of Longmont** achieved a significant increase in its commercial waste diversion rate—from 35% to 59%—following the implementation of its Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO). Passed in 2023, Longmont's URO phases in requirements for the commercial sector, including multifamily housing complexes and businesses, to offer access to recycling and composting services. Recycling requirements took effect in mid-2024, and the support from city staff and **Partners for a Clean Environment (PACE)**, including ongoing education and financial incentives, has contributed to Longmont's success.

Longmont Commercial Recycling Diversion



Longmont's Universal Recycling Ordinance, which was implemented starting in January 2024, boosted the city's commercial diversion rate. Tons of recycling diverted from the commercial sector increased from 34% in 2023 to 59% in 2024.

- On January 1, 2025, **Lafayette's Universal Recycling Ordinance** went into effect, requiring all businesses, apartment communities, and City-permitted events to provide recycling collection services. City staff partnered with **Partners for a Clean Environment (PACE)** to prepare businesses for the rollout. Outreach included door-to-door visits, mailed letters, and free resources, including customized recycling signage, indoor recycling containers, and technical assistance. The City allocated bag-fee revenue to provide rebates to businesses for beginning recycling services. On average, this incentive covered six to nine months of collection costs and gave many businesses a strong foundation for their new recycling programs.

Community programs for hard-to-recycle materials broadens access.

Numerous communities report successful diversion programs for hard-to-recycle (HTR) materials such as electronics, and household hazardous waste (HHW) that leverage partnerships with existing drop-off sites and service providers. This model works with existing nonprofit, for-profit, and county-level partners within or near communities to create solutions.

- After a weather event made the **City of Louisville** cancel a collection event in 2024, the City shifted away from a community-wide event to providing vouchers for residents to take their materials to the **Eco-Cycle/City of Boulder Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials (CHaRM)** in nearby Boulder. Further, taking inspiration from a City of Boulder program, in 2025 Louisville partnered with **Eco-Cycle** and **Ascent Church** to host a clean-up day, which included collecting HTR materials, in a mobile home community to increase access for those who may have challenges accessing the CHaRM facility. One of the biggest successes of the targeted event was that volunteers had the opportunity to engage with residents to educate them about which materials are recyclable. The event provided easy access to large-item trash and hard-to-recycle services in the neighborhood, and volunteers even drove a pick-up truck to people's homes to help residents more easily move bulky items such as TVs and mattresses.
- The **City of Thornton** hosts an electronics collection event in the spring and partners with Adams County to allow County residents to take electronics directly to the electronics recycler's location for a discounted price during specified dates.

Hard-to-recycle collection event in Lafayette, Colorado

- The **City of Lafayette** partners with several organizations around **Boulder County** to host an annual hard-to-recycle event that is free for residents in April. This year, partners at the event collected 9,863 pounds of electronics and 277 pounds of batteries, along with recyclable materials, hazardous waste, and yard trimmings.

Plastic film recycling expands into rural communities.

In January 2025, the **Colorado Circular Economy Development Center (CEDC)** launched the Colorado Transportation Network (CTN), a statewide transportation pilot project serving areas in Greater Colorado—all communities outside of the Front Range—by picking up recyclable materials that would otherwise be landfilled. As of September 2025, the CTN is serving businesses, municipalities, schools, marinas, and nonprofit partners in 18 communities across the state. The project operates on a "milk run" model, meaning that a truck departs fully loaded with products to its destination. Instead of returning empty, it makes stops along a predetermined route to collect recyclables on the way back to its starting point. Trucks transport these materials to the **Front Range Transload** facility in Pueblo, where they are aggregated, baled, and shipped to processors and manufacturers. As part of this project, the CEDC supported Front Range Transload in establishing a commercial recycling collection site in Pueblo, where a residential drop-off site previously existed but had no infrastructure available for businesses to recycle. From January through September 2025, the CTN made 26 pickups and collected more than three tons of plastic film, which has been the primary material collected. Plastic film is recycled through **Driven Plastics**, a Pueblo-based company that turns post-consumer films into an asphalt additive for roads.[46] Several communities utilize this program, including **Mountain Village, Breckenridge**, and **Steamboat Springs**. The City of Steamboat Springs set up a collection program in collaboration with the **Steamboat Ski & Resort Corporation** and the **Western Resilience Center** (formerly the **Yampa Valley Sustainability Council**).

Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) requirements are adopted to incentivize diversion over landfilling.

The Steamboat Springs City Council voted to add pay-as-you-throw, or volume-based pricing, as a requirement to their hauler licensing. The City received technical assistance from the **Colorado Circular Communities (C3) Enterprise's Strategic Technical Expertise for the Public Sector (STEPS) program**, which included two presentations to City Council about improving the city's recycling rate through either revised hauler licensing or a municipally contracted hauling program. City Council voted to move forward with updating the solid waste code and hauler licensing to require residential haulers to implement a volume-based pricing structure. This change will incentivize residents to recycle more in order to save money on trash, and can help the City improve participation in recycling. While Steamboat opted not to pursue a municipally contracted hauling system, this type of system can also help boost recycling rates by ensuring everyone has access to recycling while keeping costs stable for residents. The **City and County of Broomfield** also implemented PAYT as part of their "Universal Waste Collection" single-hauler contract.

A collaboration model provides action plans for the region and individual communities.

The South Metro communities of **Centennial**, **Englewood**, **Littleton**, and **Sheridan** collaboratively completed a **C3 STEPS** project to improve regional access to recycling and composting, reduce recoverable materials sent to landfills, and meet the individual needs of the communities. The resulting plan includes recommendations for regional strategies to improve waste diversion as well as specific recommendations for each city. This regional approach to waste diversion planning helped the four cities gain perspective on regional needs and find areas where they can collaborate for greater impact.

Multiple new MRFs have been built in preparation for Producer Responsibility.

Three recycling sorting facilities (Material Recovery Facilities, or MRFs) are in the process of being built in anticipation of Producer Responsibility significantly expanding recycling collections. **Waste Connections** and **WM** (formerly Waste Management) are each building MRFs in the Denver metro area.[47] The third is a regional MRF in **Grand Junction** serving the Western Slope. A C3 grant awarded the City of Grand Junction a $9.8 million grant for equipment in 2025. Owned by the City and operated by **Bruin Waste** through a public–private partnership that brings together public stewardship and private-sector expertise, the scalable MRF will process up to 40,000 tons of recyclables annually and accept materials from haulers across the region.[48] All three new MRFs will support local jobs and have the capacity to process tens of thousands of tons of additional single-stream recycling each year.

Zero Waste valet at Denver International Airport supports vendors.

Thanks to a C3 grant, **Denver International Airport (DEN)** launched the Zero Waste Valet program in May 2024, where team members provide back-of-house collections, training, and audits for vendors within the airport to maximize the diversion of compostables and recyclables generated by food concessions. The average participating concession's waste diversion rate increased from 25% to 75%, and DEN's average monthly compost generation nearly doubled. DEN plans to expand the Zero Waste Valet to all eligible concessions starting in 2027. Programs of this kind are made possible by DEN's commitment to becoming the most sustainable airport in the world, which is reflected in the airport's Environmental Policy, strategic plans like Vision100 and Operation 2045, and the ISO 14001 Environmental Management System (EMS).[49]

RECYCLING: LOCAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO PREPARE FOR PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

With Colorado's Producer Responsibility for recycling packaging and paper program coming online in 2026, residents will begin receiving recycling collection service at no cost. The program will start by reimbursing communities that already have coordinated recycling systems, then expand to provide access to all Coloradans. Colorado communities should consider passing local policies that ensure residents have access to recycling and require haulers to track the volume of materials they collect. The following is recommended:

1. **Guarantee recycling access for all residents by adopting an organized hauling contract or an ordinance that requires recycling to be part of all waste services offered to residents.** Communities with guaranteed services will be the easiest for the Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO) to work with and will receive reimbursements for recycling more quickly. Implementing an organized hauling contract can guarantee recycling for all residents, stabilize service costs, reduce trash truck traffic, and streamline customer service. If the community remains with an open-market system, another option is to require recycling as part of any residential waste service (bundled in, not an add-on). With either approach, all residents will have access to recycling and be able to benefit from the PRO paying for their recycling.
2. **Require hauler licensing for residential and commercial waste and recycling haulers.** Hauler licensing allows the city to track who provides waste and recycling collection services and sets guidelines for how those services can be provided within the city. Guidelines can include requirements for insurance, safety specifications, minimum service standards, and restrictions on when operations can occur to reduce traffic and noise. To facilitate reimbursements for recycling from the PRO, it is important that the hauler licensing program require regular reporting data on trash, recycling, and organic tonnage. To ensure residents receive recycling services as stated above, hauler licensing can also require all providers to include recycling as part of their services. Additionally, hauler licensing can require volume-based pricing (see below).
3. **Require volume-based pricing.** Volume-based pricing, also known as Pay-As-You-Throw or PAYT, charges customers for trash services based on the size of the trash collection bin. Residents automatically receive a recycling bin (and sometimes in addition, organics bins) at no added cost. A PAYT rate structure incentivizes residents to recycle and compost by charging customers based on the amount of trash they throw out. PAYT pricing can be included in hauler licensing, a service ordinance, or a hauling contract.

4. **Adopt a Universal Zero Waste Ordinance.** A Universal Zero Waste Ordinance (UZWO), sometimes called a Universal Recycling Ordinance (URO), requires multifamily complex and commercial property owners to provide recycling services. While local governments may contract for hauling services for residential properties, under state law they cannot require commercial properties to be part of a specific hauling contract. They can, however, require commercial properties, including multifamily properties, to subscribe to trash, recycling, and organics hauling services. Colorado's EPR program will cover the costs of providing recycling collection services for multifamily housing buildings, but not for the commercial sector.
5. **Require equal space for recycling and trash.** Update ordinances or building codes to require equal space for recycling and trash at new and remodeled multifamily and commercial buildings. Equal space ordinances ensure that remodels and future buildings are designed to provide sufficient space for recycling bins, since a lack of space is a common barrier to expanding recycling in older, dense commercial areas.

RECYCLING: STATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Adopt policies that will ban intentionally added toxins from packaging.** Colorado should join with other states that require producers to certify that they have not intentionally added toxins to their packaging. The Toxics in Packaging Clearinghouse is a coalition of states that have adopted scientifically-backed thresholds for the safety of additives in packaging and have processes in place for producers to prove their packaging meets these safety thresholds.
2. **Implement Producer Responsibility.** CDPHE staff should continue their good work to implement Producer Responsibility for packaging (HB22-1355). The implementation of Colorado's Producer Responsibility program must ensure the establishment of a strong, equitable statewide system for recycling that encourages producers to design more recyclable packaging that uses less material and more recycled content and eliminates harmful additives.
3. **Implement Battery Stewardship for all types of batteries and electronics.** The battery stewardship program established by SB25-163 creates statewide access to safe battery collection and recycling for small- and medium-format loose batteries. Next, the state should consider adopting laws for the safe collection and recycling of large-format batteries (e.g., electric vehicles) and electronics, including those with embedded batteries (e.g., cell phones, light-up shoes, electronic smoking devices or vapes).

Colorado Recycling Champions

Meet a couple of the many champions driving Colorado's circular solutions for recycling.

Jennifer Schenk
Executive Director, High Country Conservation Center (HC3)

"I'm passionate about protecting Summit County's beautiful mountains for my kids and future generations. I co-led the successful Strong Future mill levy campaign that created ongoing support for local recycling and composting programs. With this funding, we have expanded recyclable materials and food scrap collection, increased drop-off locations, and made recycling accessible for every home and business through pay-as-you-throw and universal recycling ordinances. Today, we are engaging Summit's Latino community to boost recycling participation and tackling construction waste reduction."

Dee Hostetler
Manager, Clean Valley Recycling, Swink, Colorado

"I have always had a love of nature, and working as a nurse for many years, I learned that a healthy environment is fundamental to healthy people. Recycling is one thing that each one of us can do to improve our environment. I helped start Clean Valley Recycling because our rural Eastern Plains community had a need for more recycling. Some folks were taking their recyclables long distances to get them recycled. We started small and with the help of an affordable warehouse and grant funds from CDPHE, we are now a full-service recycler and we have significantly raised the recycling awareness in our local community."

RECOVERING RESOURCES AND BUILDING LOCAL ECONOMIES THROUGH DECONSTRUCTION, RECYCLING & REUSE

Construction and demolition (C&D) materials, such as lumber, asphalt, concrete, and metals, account for roughly 25% of Colorado's overall waste stream; yet, the potential to reuse and recycle these materials is often overlooked. **By some estimates*, the waste from one home demolition is nearly equivalent to the waste generated by one American over their lifetime.**[50] If we shift from "construction and demolition," where materials are destroyed and no longer usable, to "construction and deconstruction," where buildings are systematically dismantled to maximize resource recovery, we dramatically reduce materials going to landfill and instead can recapture 25% of materials through reuse, and an additional 50% through recycling (for some structures, the amount that can be recycled and reused is even higher).[51]

See Recycle Colorado's "Colorado Construction, Demolition, and Deconstruction Policy Toolkit" for local case studies and guidance on advancing C&D recycling policy and programs.

C&D recycling and reuse not only minimizes the amount of valuable material buried in landfills but also provides a much-needed local supply of building materials. Many types of C&D materials, such as flooring and cabinets, can be resold and reused directly, bypassing the transportation and processing costs associated with recycling, landfilling, or creating new products from raw materials. Selling deconstructed materials adds to the local economy in many parts of the state where goods are sold for reuse by nonprofit organizations like the Habitat for Humanity ReStore or Resource Central, governments like the Pitkin County landfill's Motherlode Mercantile, or for-profit businesses, including the retail arm of Perks Deconstruction, Perks Reclaimed.

*Estimate based on an average of 120,000 pounds waste from the demolition of one 1,500-square-foot house. Average lifespan of 78.4 years times 4.4 pounds of municipal solid waste per day equaling 122,000 pounds.[50]

Deconstruction project by Perks Deconstruction, a nationally recognized leader in deconstruction based in Commerce City, Colorado

COLORADO DECONSTRUCTION MODELS

Deconstruction ordinances drive diversion.

- Several Colorado communities, including **Aspen, Lakewood, Boulder, Denver**, and **Pitkin County**, are shifting the narrative from "demolition" to "deconstruction" by advancing policies and programs that require recycling and reuse of materials in remodels and/or new builds. In **Pitkin County** in 2024, approximately 52% (amounting to over 17,000 tons) of C&D materials were diverted from the landfill.[52] While Boulder and Pitkin County have led the state in deconstruction programs, Aspen, Lakewood, and Denver have taken action more recently. For example, **Denver**'s Waste No More Ordinance, scheduled for implementation in September 2026, will require C&D recycling for certain buildings, transforming C&D material markets in the Denver area. Additionally, **Summit County** is building on a 2023 plan to improve C&D reuse through C3-funded technical assistance to analyze the potential impacts of a C&D recycling ordinance.[53]
- **City of Boulder**'s deconstruction ordinance requires at least 75% of material, by weight, and three or more different material types from all residential and commercial full-structure removals to be reused or recycled. As part of the permit application process, the applicant must pay a refundable deposit of $1 per square foot (minimum $1,500), plus a $219 nonrefundable fee. Deposits are refunded once proof of diversion and compliance is shown through weight tickets and other documentation from approved recycling and reuse locations. Since the ordinance took effect in July 2020, the program has diverted over 105,000 tons from the landfill (76% of all materials from buildings taken down within city limits).[54]

Construction resale hubs serving multiple communities

- Boulder-based nonprofit **Resource Central** serves as a hub for donating and reselling C&D materials. Resource Central has partnered with nearby communities, including Boulder, Erie, Longmont, and Lafayette, through its Material Reuse Pickup Program, making C&D reuse convenient and diverting a significant amount of material from being buried in landfills. In 2024, the **City of Lafayette** worked with Resource Central to divert over 23,000 pounds of material from the landfill, and nearly 70,000 pounds of material have already been collected for reuse in the first half of 2025.[55]

Donated materials collected by Resource Central

- **Perks Reclaimed, operated by Perks Deconstruction,** based in Commerce City, is a nationally recognized leader in deconstruction, having recovered over 260,000 pounds of reusable material and recycled nearly 840,000 pounds of material from 208 deconstruction projects in 2024 alone.[56]

DECONSTRUCTION: LOCAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Commit to deconstruction rather than demolition for municipal buildings.** Local governments should demonstrate their commitment to circularity and lead by example by deconstructing rather than demolishing buildings owned by the local government. If deconstruction services are unavailable, local governments can still commit to recycling C&D materials when constructing and demolishing buildings under their jurisdiction.
2. **Require reclaimed or reused materials to be used in municipal infrastructure projects.** Local governments should play an active role in supporting deconstruction by buying and using reclaimed materials. This could include using recycled aggregates in infrastructure and transportation projects and using reused materials, such as desks and office chairs, in local government-owned and/or operated buildings.

3. **Adopt deconstruction and recycling requirements.** Require the recycling of materials at all deconstruction and remodel sites, and a waste plan that describes how the recycling requirements will be met. These policies can start with requirements to recycle materials for which there are existing recycling options, such as plastic film, cardboard, and metal. Going a step further, a larger-scale deconstruction and reuse policy can require concrete, wood, and other materials to be diverted from the landfill. Best practice relies on receipts to track material diversion.
4. **Adopt building code guidelines that allow for the reuse of unstamped reclaimed lumber.** Allowing for the reuse of safe, certified reclaimed lumber, following examples in Oregon (R104.9.1) and Washington State (WAC 51-50-2303), will support local deconstruction businesses and increase the supply of available lumber for builders. In recent years, lumber has become especially expensive, and markets are uncertain due to federal tariff policies.

DECONSTRUCTION: STATE-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Commit to deconstruction rather than demolition for state buildings.** Our State government should commit to deconstructing rather than demolishing state-owned buildings. If deconstruction services are unavailable, given that state-owned buildings are geographically dispersed, the State can still commit to recycling as much C&D material as possible. Additionally, the State should buy and use recycled and reusable materials.
2. **Support deconstruction and reuse projects.** The State should continue to play an active role in supporting deconstruction projects and C&D recycling through C3 funding and technical support.

EXTENDING THE LIFE OF EXTRACTED NATURAL RESOURCES BY

REDUCING, REPAIRING, AND REUSING

Reducing the amount of materials consumed and reusing goods for as long as possible are crucial pieces of the puzzle to create a circular economy and reduce overall waste. Reducing, repairing, and reusing prevents the need for natural resource extraction in the first place, mitigating the negative environmental and social impacts of creating new things.

Emissions produced throughout a product's entire lifecycle—from resource extraction to disposal—are known as "consumption-based emissions." These emissions account for roughly 42% of the US greenhouse gas footprint.[57] Recycling plays an important role in reducing them by cutting the need for raw material extraction and lowering manufacturing impacts, but recycling alone isn't enough. To meaningfully reduce these emissions, we must first minimize unnecessary consumption, repair items whenever possible, and extend their lifespan through reuse before finally recycling. Together, reducing, repairing, reusing, and recycling (or composting) form the connected steps needed to shift from a linear production system to a truly circular economy.

Many practices, policies, and interventions can reduce material consumption. Products should be redesigned to use fewer resources, reduce toxins, and increase recycled content. Design should also prioritize longevity of use, repairability, and ease of recycling. Burgeoning systems for reuse need to be expanded to keep products and materials in circulation for as long as possible. These systems can happen at hyper-local scales, like **Red Rocks Amphitheater** providing reusable cups, or larger scales, like municipal or regional programs such as **Frisco**'s Free Repair Fair or the nonprofit Boulder U-Fix-It Clinics. These systemic changes can start small but have the potential to have large-scale impacts.

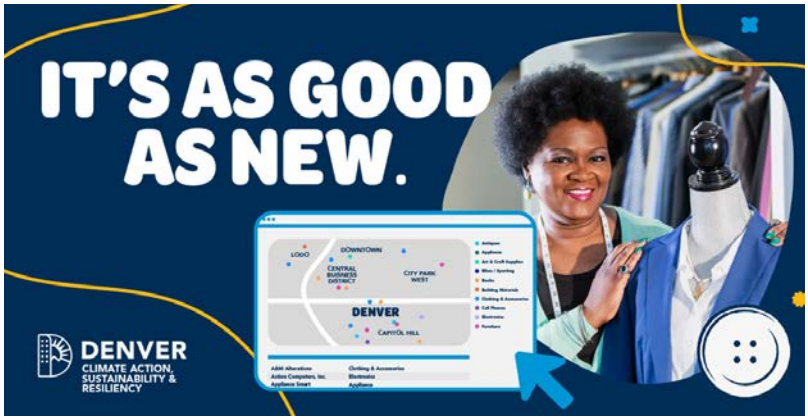
While important, individual efforts to reduce and reuse cannot fix our wasteful system—we need systemic change to make reuse the easiest option for everyone. In today's linear economy, where most companies aren't held responsible for the end-of-life of the products they produce, it can be nearly impossible for consumers to find goods without excessive packaging, or those designed for repair and longevity. Even the most well-intentioned, informed consumers struggle to avoid disposable items that saturate US society. Redesigning products as well as production systems is essential to create change at the scale we need.

COMING IN 2026: RIGHT TO REPAIR FOR CONSUMER AND BUSINESS ELECTRONICS

Starting on January 1, 2026, Colorado's third Right to Repair law, HB24-1121, will go into effect, requiring manufacturers to allow consumers and independent businesses to access parts, tools, and documentation needed to repair a range of electronic products. When people can fix their own stuff or choose a local business to fix it, it reduces waste and pollution and cuts costs for consumers. The new law includes coverage for computers, appliances, cell phones, and IT equipment found in homes and businesses. Based on a **CoPIRG survey of Right to Repair laws**, Coloradans will have the broadest repair rights of anyone in the country when this policy kicks in on January 1, 2026. Right to Repair will reduce e-waste, the fastest-growing part of the US municipal waste stream, by giving Coloradans the tools to extend the life of dozens of electronics we use on a daily basis.

COLORADO REUSE AND REPAIR MODELS

- **Deconstruction instead of demolition creates local economic opportunities. As described on page 31**, communities across Colorado are already taking action to reuse building materials. Unlike recycling systems that require infrastructure to reprocess C&D materials, building materials, such as cabinets, doors, and flooring, can be readily recovered and resold. Deconstruction, which can be supported by state and local policies and grants, offers a tremendous opportunity to create local jobs and supplies of affordable building materials.
- **Switching from disposables to reusables creates economic benefits.** The **City and County of Denver** completed a report demonstrating the findings from their **Reuse Denver pilot program**, which reduced waste in the food service industry through adopting reusable serviceware. Results showed that switching to reusable items can lead to significant financial benefits.[58] The program worked with 27 retail food establishments for one year to eliminate single-use service items for dine-in purposes. Collectively, participating food establishments prevented nearly 960,000 single-use items from being purchased and entering the waste stream, and achieved nearly $100,000 in annual cost savings from those avoided purchases. On average, each participant reduced over 35,000 single-use items annually and saved $3,600 from avoided purchases. Denver's Office of Climate Action, Sustainability, and



The City of Denver ran ads to direct people to use the Denver Reuse Business Directory to engage in the local reuse economy.

Resiliency provided up to $600 worth of reusable serviceware and offered customized technical assistance to each participating business. The City is planning to launch a second iteration of the program that will work in-depth with business owners to evaluate waste streams and complement upcoming compost requirements under the Waste No More ordinance.

- **Financial incentives spur the adoption of reuse over disposables.** In Denver, Lafayette, and Boulder, businesses can receive incentives for investing in durable, reusable serviceware or dishwashers to reduce single-use waste. The **City and County of Denver** offers Certifiably Green Denver Mini-Grants of up to $10,000 in upfront costs for small businesses and nonprofits to meet their sustainability goals.[59] These mini-grants may be used to cover the costs of a dishwasher. The **City of Lafayette** offers a one-time rebate of up to 50% of total project costs, with a maximum of $1,000, for businesses purchasing reusable solutions, such as dishwashers or durable serviceware. This initiative helps businesses reduce waste and adopt sustainable practices that transition from single-use to reuse. In the **City of Boulder**, **Partners for a Clean Environment (PACE)** offers a one-time refund of up to 70% of total costs, up to $2,000, for reusable solutions such as dishwashers, durable dishware, and more.[60] The **City of Boulder** also offers $1,500 worth of free reusable takeout container services to restaurants that want to try them out.[61]
- **Reusables replace disposables for municipal events.** Several Colorado cities launched internal systems in the past year to check out reusable dishware, reducing single-use items in kitchens, events, and meetings.[62] The **City of Lakewood** launched a reusable dishware program for City-run and external events as part of its Sustainable Neighborhood Program. The **City of Longmont** created a Reusable Dishware Program for City staff to check out dishware for meetings and events. The **City of Louisville** received a **Boulder County** Circular Economy grant that supplied the employee kitchen with reusable items, reducing the need for disposable supplies. These programs are not only reducing waste but also saving the municipalities money on single-use items and building staff morale and buy-in to sustainability efforts.

REDUCE, REUSE, REPAIR: LOCAL POLICY AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Many policy levers and programs can help build systems to enable reducing and reusing. Even simple interventions can have a massive, measurable impact, since so many existing systems are designed for single-use items (see the 2023 State of Recycling and Composting in Colorado Report for more details).

1. **Join the Colorado Reuse Leaders**. Join the growing number of municipalities, businesses, organizations, and individuals interested in promoting reuse, refill, and waste reduction systems in Colorado through the free Colorado Reuse Leaders group and webinars. Email ryan@ecocycle.org to get involved. Eco-Cycle continues to host regular, free Colorado Reuse Leaders calls online, learning from reuse leaders within and outside the state to foster dialogue and learning for businesses, municipalities, and individuals looking to expand reuse in Colorado. Visit ecocycle.org/reuse-leaders to learn more.
2. **Adopt reuse for dine-in ordinance.** Adopt an ordinance requiring restaurants and food vendors serving prepared foods to use reusable foodware for dine-in service. Such an ordinance can also aim to reduce single-use accessories, like straws, stirrers, condiment packets, lids, and utensils, by requiring that they be provided only when a customer specifically requests them.
3. **Support businesses in switching to reusables.** Work with local food and hospitality businesses to switch to reusable alternatives over single-use options and to provide single-use items only when customers request them. This could include subsidizing the cost of introductory reuse/refill equipment (such as bulk or personal care dispensers in hotels and spas, and condiment dispensers, durable serviceware, and dishwashers in food establishments) or subscriptions to reuse services for local businesses and events.
4. **Reuse at government events and buildings**. Local governments can adopt internal policies or practices by implementing reusable items at government-led events and in government buildings. This can include offering reusable dishware for employees to check out for meetings, community events, or celebrations. Government procurement policies can also be updated to ban or limit government purchases of single-use plastics, except when necessary, such as for water bottles or straws.
5. **Promote water refill**. Ensure residents have access to clean drinking water, eliminating the need to spend money on bottled water. Invest in and promote water refill stations in schools, government buildings, and at events, and adopt codes to require refill stations in large commercial and government buildings.
6. **Use reusables in schools**. Financially support reusables—such as reusable trays and serviceware—and bulk milk in cafeterias. Reusable items can save schools money and help show students how to reduce waste.

REDUCE, REUSE, REPAIR: STATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Update state procurement policies to include reuse.** The state should update its purchasing policies by adopting models from other states, such as New York and Massachusetts, that prioritize outcomes like reducing toxicity in cleaning supplies and prioritizing products with higher recycled content.[63] Green purchasing policies can save governments money and reduce the need to purchase products by including reuse and repair requirements, and by requiring green certifications. For example, the State of New York reported saving nearly $2 million in a single year by purchasing only EPEAT certified IT equipment. As described in the Office of Sustainability Strategic Plan, Colorado has achieved many of its "Greening Government Goals" and has the potential to make a measurable difference in waste reduction.
2. **Adopt reuse purchasing guidelines for State-operated events.** Office kitchens and events that include food can often generate large volumes of waste, especially considering disposable food service items such as cups, plates, and cutlery. The State should develop policies and procedures that prioritize reuse for food serviceware items in offices and at events. Case studies have repeatedly shown that replacing disposable food serviceware items with durable, reusable alternatives saves users money.[64] Additionally, the State could save money by creating an inventory of office equipment to be shared or reused between departments, minimizing the need for additional purchasing.
3. **Conduct a statewide consumption-based emissions inventory.** Currently, most greenhouse gas emissions inventories do not account for the production and transportation of food and materials imported into Colorado. However, the EPA estimates that consumption-based emissions in the US are as high as 42% of all emissions.[65] Zero Waste is about our whole system of consumption and consumerism, and having a thorough understanding of the climate impact of our economy will help us work toward more effective greenhouse gas reduction strategies. As recommended in Colorado's Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap, Colorado should conduct a statewide consumption-based emissions inventory.

Colorado Reduce and Reuse Champions

Meet a couple of the many champions driving Colorado's circular solutions for reduction and reuse.

Declan Cunningham, Senior at Vail Mountain School

Declan's passion for reducing waste, in particular single-use plastics, in the community led him to present the environmental and health impacts of single-use plastics to the Vail Town Council. As a result of his work, the Vail Town Council has directed staff to create an actionable plan to work with businesses and the community to reduce single-use plastics, with an end goal of policy development. Declan continues to advocate for a single-use plastic reduction ordinance by engaging Vail residents through education, gathering petition signatures, and through his continued civic engagement. Declan has demonstrated dedication and leadership in reducing single-use plastics in hopes of creating a healthier future for generations to come.

Amber Barbella, Owner and Operator of Diversion Designers

In 2023 and 2024, Amber provided hands-on technical support in collaboration with the City and County of Denver to implement the Reuse Denver program, helping nearly thirty restaurants transition from single-use to durable, washable food serviceware. The Reuse Denver program shows Colorado-specific examples of restaurants and food retail establishments saving money and reducing waste, while transparently describing the challenges with implementation. As a young entrepreneur, Amber and her team have proven to be on-the-ground changemakers.

THE BIG PICTURE

BUILDING TOWARD A CIRCULAR COLORADO

Across Colorado, local governments, businesses, schools, nonprofits, and individuals are laying the foundation to shift our linear system into a truly circular one. As a society, we cannot extract natural resources as if they were infinite in order to endlessly produce goods, many of which are used only once or never at all, and recycle just a fraction while the rest are buried in landfills, incinerated, or littered in the environment. To achieve a circular economy, we must design every step of the system—from resource extraction and product design to repair, reuse, recycling, composting, and remanufacturing—with waste reduction, recovery, and regeneration in mind.

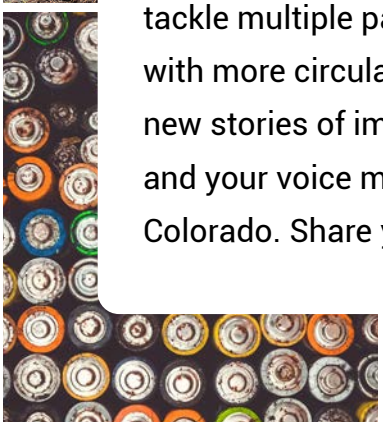
Creating this new system requires every piece of the puzzle (reducing, reusing, recycling, composting, and more) to come together at local, state, and regional levels. It's not an easy task, but the future we can build together is greater than the sum of its parts. A circular Colorado is one that uses resources wisely, restores soils through regenerative agriculture, reduces emissions and energy use, and invests in local jobs, supply chains, and communities, creating a more resilient and connected state.

Colorado is already making huge strides toward that future. The stories and champions highlighted in this report represent just a glimpse of the incredible progress underway. But this movement is bigger than any one organization or policy—it depends on all of us. Together, we must keep pushing for change, sharing ideas, and advocating for Zero Waste solutions that bring us closer to a circular economy that works for everyone.

Every action adds up. As Colorado's Producer Responsibility program for packaging and paper takes effect, expanding and funding recycling statewide, communities can build on that momentum by simultaneously advancing other Zero Waste initiatives. These may include expanding curbside organics collection for composting, developing programs for hard-to-recycle materials or C&D materials not covered under the Producer Responsibility framework, supporting waste diversion programs for businesses, and strengthening Zero Waste education and engagement programs in schools and throughout the broader community.



Across the state, people and communities are finding creative solutions that tackle multiple parts of the linear "take, make, waste" system—replacing them with more circular strategies. Each year brings new leadership, new ideas, and new stories of impact. You are part of this picture. Your choices, your actions, and your voice matter. Thank you for helping to build a more circular, sustainable Colorado. Share your story. Inspire others. Together, we can close the loop.




PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: KEY ELEMENTS NEEDED TO BUILD COLORADO'S CIRCULARITY

Building a truly circular economy in Colorado requires both resources and collaboration. This transformation depends on many interconnected elements: advocates who can envision and drive solutions; funding to sustain the work; technical expertise to research and share best practices; education and outreach to engage communities; policies and programs that provide consistent statewide direction; and the infrastructure needed to put solutions into action. Fortunately, Colorado already has a strong foundation to build on, including, but certainly not limited to, the following initiatives:

ADVOCACY

- Groups around the state are working individually and collectively toward Zero Waste and circularity. **Recycle Colorado** and the **Colorado Composting Council (COCC**) act as organizing coalitions to move policy and programs forward in the areas of recycling and organics diversion. For example, Recycle Colorado brings together key players to advocate for successful implementation of Producer Responsibility for Recycling of packaging and paper. Another Colorado example is when environmental groups created a coalition made up of **Citizens Alliance for a Sustainable Englewood (CASE)**, **CoPIRG**, **Colorado Communities for Climate Action**, **Eco-Cycle**, **Environment Colorado**, **Good Business Colorado**, **GreenLatinos**, **Inland Ocean Coalition**, **League of Women Voters**, and **Sierra Club** that drove the passage of the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act.

FUNDING

- **State level**: The **Colorado Circular Communities (C3) Enterprise** is a national model showing the State's commitment to funding waste reduction and diversion programs. Launched in 2024, C3 combined and improved on previous state grant programs, all of which have been funded by landfill tipping fees. C3 provides direct grants to local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, schools, and tribes, as well as funding strategic programs including the NextCycle recycling business incubator, the Circular Economy Development Center, and the Strategic Technical Expertise for the Public Sector (STEPS) program.

City of Boulder Bring Your Bag sign

- **Community level**: Multiple communities across the state support Zero Waste efforts through designated funds. Some, like **Boulder**, **Vail**, and **Summit County**, have specific sustainability taxes. Many others are leveraging single-use checkout bag fees from local laws or the State Plastic Pollution Reduction Act to fund sustainability efforts. Some communities are allocating funding from general funds to achieve sustainability goals, many of which have co-benefits with other goals. For example, funding programs to apply compost to public land achieves the sustainability goal of driving organics diversion while also mitigating and filtering stormwater run-off, building soils that are more tolerant of drought and flooding, and reducing demand for irrigation.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

- **For communities: STEPS** provides technical assistance to Colorado local governments, tribes, and public K–12 school districts to enhance circularity by implementing sustainable, long-term solutions tailored to each community's unique needs. With consulting services provided by **Resource Recycling Systems (RRS)** and **Eco-Cycle**, STEPS has helped communities with a range of projects in the past year, including policy recommendations on recycling and composting for the cities of **Fort Lupton**, **Fort Collins**, and **Steamboat Springs**; communications and public engagement around rolling out residential waste and recycling services in **Broomfield**; waste diversion action plans for **Arvada**, the **Adams 12 Five Star School District**, and South Metro region (including **Centennial, Englewood, Littleton,** and **Sheridan**); and more.
- **For businesses**: The **Circular Economy Development Center** (CEDC), operated by **Circular Colorado**, supports businesses that use recycled content in their processes and reduces barriers to capturing more recycled content in Colorado supply chains. The CEDC has established offices in Grand Junction, Cortez, Colorado Springs, and Denver,

and continues to expand its network of collaborators. It identified construction and demolition debris, plastics, textiles, and waste tires as priority materials for end-market development. In the past year, the CEDC helped secure $11.2 million from C3 for a crumb rubber processing facility to recycle waste tires, launched the Circular Transportation Network to collect recyclable materials from communities around the state, and mapped the circular textile supply chain to identify gaps and opportunities.[66]

- **For entrepreneurs: NextCycle**, operated by **RRS**, provides support and resources to start-ups and expanding businesses focused on creating markets for recycled, reused, and recovered materials in Colorado. It includes a six-month program that provides participants with technical resources, mentorship, and a multi-day business-planning-focused bootcamp culminating in a pitch competition.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & EDUCATION

- **Community engagement**: Community buy-in is crucial for successful Zero Waste operations and in the transition to a more circular system. Local governments statewide host sustainability advisory committees, and nonprofit groups like **Eco-Action Partners**, **Eco-Cycle, High Country Conservation Center, GreenLatinos, Walking Mountains Science Center,** and the **Western Resilience Center** (previously known as the **Yampa Valley Sustainability Council)** foster community engagement and build sustainability champions who become peer educators sharing Zero Waste ideas and practices with their friends, families, and community members. These champions work together and take individual actions to support Zero Waste solutions in their communities.
- **Fostering lifelong Zero Waste Champions**: To build a Zero Waste society, we need individuals who understand why their actions matter and how to participate in a circular economy. The best place to start is in schools—to teach children who will carry these lessons forward throughout their lives. Often supported by nonprofit organizations such as **Eco-Cycle**, **High Country Conservation Center,** and **Walking Mountains Science Center**, an increasing number of schools and school districts across Colorado are putting the pieces together by providing students, teachers, and staff with hands-on education and training on waste reduction, composting, and recycling practices. For example, Eco-Cycle's Green Star Schools Program has helped reduce waste by up to 67% at participating schools in longstanding partner districts **Boulder Valley School District** and **St. Vrain Valley School District**.[67] With support from the City and County of **Broomfield**, **Adams 12 Five Star School District** added its first school to the program in 2024. In the fall of 2025, the **City of Lakewood** partnered with the **Jefferson County School District** and **Eco-Cycle** to launch the first Green Star School in Lakewood and in Jeffco Schools, using bag fee funding.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

- As highlighted throughout this report, more communities have adopted and begun implementing Universal Recycling Ordinances (UROs, sometimes referred to as Universal Zero Waste Ordinances, or UZWOs) that require recycling and organics collection at businesses and multifamily complexes. These policies expand service access to residents who often lack diversion services, even when communities have organized hauling programs for single-family residents (state law prohibits requiring multifamily complexes of eight or more units to participate in hauling contracts).[68] UROs also reinforce overall sustainability goals and behavior-change messaging, both of which aim to encourage diversion behavior across a community.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- To build a circular economy for all of Colorado, we need diversified and distributed infrastructure throughout the state. This includes multi-scale organics collection and processing facilities. We need appropriate collection methods and processing for common recyclables, hard-to-recycle (HTR) materials, and household hazardous waste (HHW) materials. Investments in organics diversion and processing from businesses and governments are beginning to create the needed organics infrastructure. Government and commercial investments in recycling have laid a strong foundation upon which the Producer Responsibility program will expand packaging recycling to all Coloradans. Important next steps will include building out infrastructure for HTR and HHW materials, which are lacking across Colorado. The Battery Stewardship Law, passed in 2025, is an important step.

Colorado Circularity Champions

Meet a couple of the many champions driving circularity in Colorado.

Colorado State Senator Lisa Cutter

"One of my first priorities as a legislator was to address our waste and plastics issues, where I felt there was a significant opportunity to make a positive impact. Both are directly linked to climate change and are also important issues for our youth. I am proud to have championed Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging in 2022, which has been a model for several other states seeking to increase recycling rates and improve the system. I am also proud of having championed the bill that led to the State's second organics management study and resulting toolkit. I will continue to work on efforts to reduce waste, divert materials from landfills, and build healthy soils in our state."

Meghan Teegarden
Sustainability Program Manager for Jeffco Public Schools

"When the City of Lakewood approached me about partnering to bring Zero Waste education to a local school, I jumped at the opportunity. Waste is something students interact with on a daily basis, especially in the cafeteria, and it's an area where they have real power to make a difference when given the opportunity. Through the Eco-Cycle Green Star Schools program at Rose Stein Elementary, students are learning how to recycle and compost their waste, why it matters, and hopefully bringing more awareness to their homes and community. I'm especially passionate about composting in schools because the impact is immediate. On our first day of introducing composting in the cafeteria, Rose Stein reduced trash from eight bags to one, and diverted three bags to recycling and 65 pounds of food waste to composting. Over the course of a school year, this can lead to a huge impact, and I'd love to bring this type of partnership to more schools at Jeffco."

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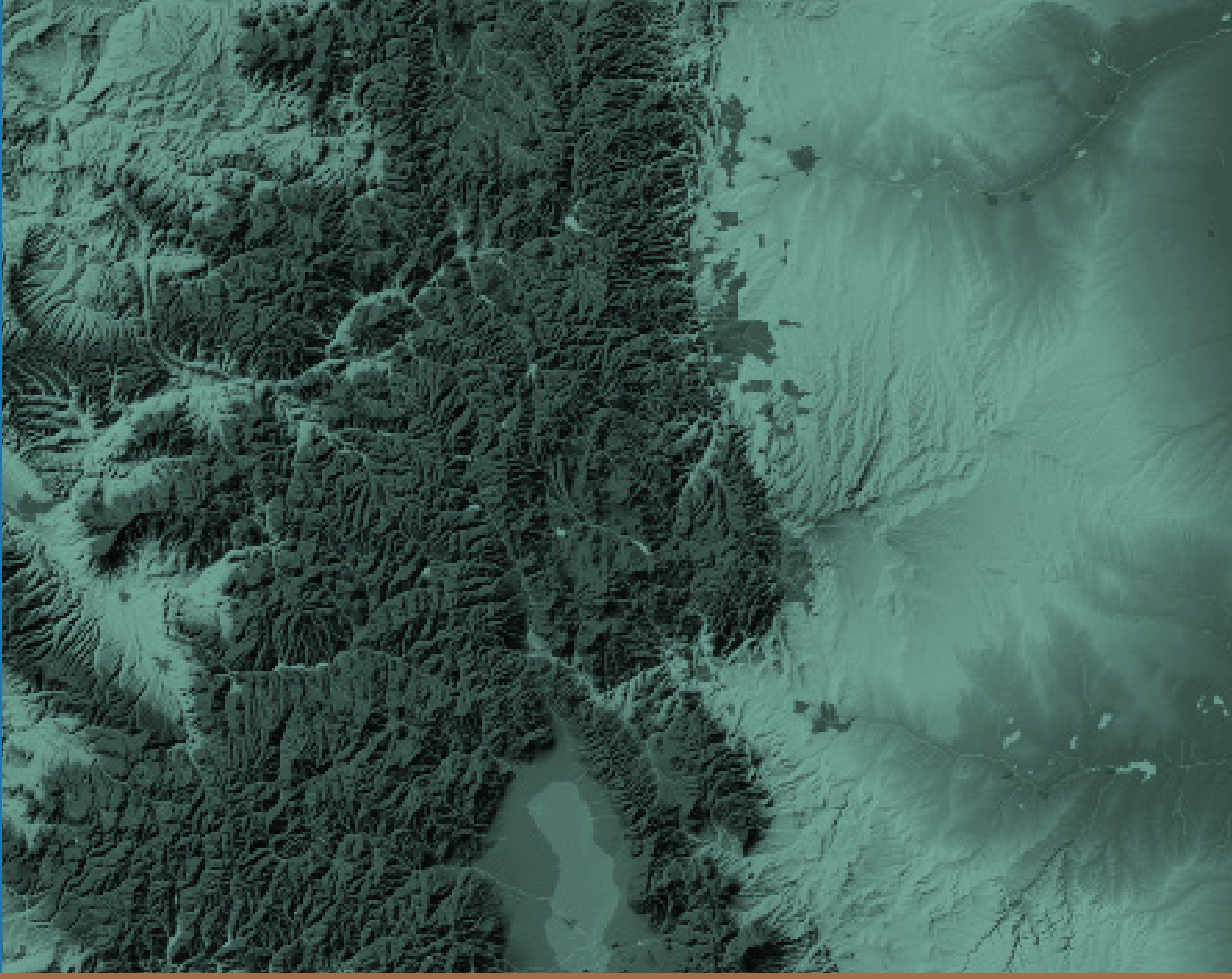

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