Aurora is excited to begin the process of permitting and building Wild Horse Reservoir. Wild Horse Reservoir will be a significant and multi-purpose reservoir located in Park County near Hartsel, Colorado.

About Aurora Water

Aurora Water provides drinking water to over 400,000 residents living in Aurora, Colorado. As one of the largest cities in the state not located near major water sources, Aurora has been innovative in how it manages its precious water resources. Aurora Water’s mission is to enhance and protect the quality of life for Aurora citizens by providing safe, dependable and sustainable water, sewer and stormwater services, today and in the future. From drastically reducing water consumption through conservation that has slashed water use by 36% since 2000, and pioneering potable reuse, Aurora has a proven track record of looking for creative, cost-effective and environmentally friendly ways to meet its community’s water needs. Aurora’s excellent conservation programs mean Aurora residents use less water per person than most Front Range cities.

Aurora receives 50% of its water from the South Platte River Basin, 25% from the Colorado River Basin and 25% from the Arkansas River Basin. Aurora’s water is transported up to 150 miles through a complex and extensive system. Aurora’s water is stored in 12 reservoirs that hold more than 156,000 acre-feet – enough water to supply the city for several years. However, given future water needs, a new reservoir would benefit Aurora.

Importance of Water Storage

Maintaining sustainable water supplies through reservoir storage allows Aurora to use the water that it owns when it’s needed. Reservoirs store water in average and wet years and release it during heightened demand or drought periods. Aurora’s successful conservation program and storage reservoirs work hand in hand. The water our customers save is stored for use when it’s needed.

The Colorado Water Plan highlights a significant gap in water supply statewide by 2050, with projects such as Wild Horse to help bridge the supply shortage. Aurora’s Integrated Water Master Plan, which also plans over 50 years ahead, determined that additional water storage was necessary to continue to provide reliable and sustainable water for our citizens on a daily basis. The Master Plan determined that a new reservoir would provide drought protection, resiliency in the face of climate change, enhanced system reliability and enable Aurora to meet future demands of our growing community.

Aurora Water has determined that, combined with our ongoing water conservation and reuse efforts, a new reservoir is the most cost-effective supply strategy available to Aurora at this time. Wild Horse Reservoir is the best potential plan that fills a water supply gap in the South Platte River Basin and allows Aurora to better manage the water it has.
About Wild Horse Reservoir

Wild Horse will allow Aurora to more efficiently, effectively and reliably manage its resources, particularly its Arkansas River Basin water. The source of the water will be existing water rights from the Colorado and Arkansas river basins as no new water rights are being pursued for this project. Currently, Aurora is often forced to release or sell its Arkansas River water due to storage constraints. Wild Horse would allow for Aurora to better manage the water it owns the right to.

The site for Wild Horse Reservoir was selected due to its proximity to existing infrastructure, increasing the efficiency and decreasing the cost of the project. It will be near an existing pipeline from the Otero Pump Station that already delivers transbasin water to Aurora’s system and is six miles west of Aurora’s existing Spinney Mountain Reservoir.

Wild Horse would allow Aurora to efficiently store and manage transbasin water we currently own and divert. We could then store that water at a higher elevation in the South Platte Basin, effectively reducing evaporation, minimizing spills and reducing waste. From Wild Horse Reservoir, the water would flow to Spinney Mountain Reservoir by pipeline and into the city’s water system via the South Platte River. The location has very favorable topography and environmental conditions. Initial studies have determined there are no jurisdictional wetlands or endangered species at the site. The majority of the property needed for construction is privately owned and undeveloped, and Aurora has acquired a significant portion of the land needed for the project. Several small parcels are owned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). BLM will lead the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to determine the impacts of the project.

Fast Facts:

- Evaluating a reservoir size up to 93,000 acre-feet
- Permitting will be led by the BLM
- Impacts to Aurora’s water rates are projected to be minimal
- Favorable environmental conditions/minimal environmental impacts
- A substantial amount of the land needed to build the reservoir has already been acquired
- Working with Park County to minimize impacts and maximize benefits to the county
- Target completion date in the 2030s

Benefits:

- Allows Aurora to better manage its water supply, helping protect against drought and improve operational efficiency
- Provides Aurora with increased system reliability
- Provides recreational amenities and economic benefits for Park County
- Reservoir is off-channel so no streams will be dammed. Preliminary analysis shows environmental impacts appear to be minimal

For More Information:
Website - WildHorseReservoir.org
Email - WildHorseReservoir@auroragov.org

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