

2014 Legislature was hip deep in water bills

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The legislative session that just wrapped up featured more significant water bills than the Colorado General Assembly has considered for several years. They ranged from a proposal to limit lawn sizes in new developments relying on agricultural water to technical tweaks to Colorado's complex system of administering water rights.

Promoting efficiency and flexibility were common themes in bills introduced, along with programs to help repair infrastructure damaged by last fall's floods. Some were passed and some weren't, and the water gossip network is buzzing with rumors that Gov. John Hickenlooper is being lobbied to veto some of the measures. Here's a quick summary of some of the more high-profile bills that were considered and their fates.

Lawn limits: Senate Bill 14-017, in its original form, sought to limit the replacement of irrigated farmland with irrigated lawns. The bill would have prohibited approval of new subdivisions that buy agricultural water rights unless lawns are limited to 15 percent or less of the total area of the residential lots. The bill was passed after being converted into a study of ways to limit municipal outdoor water use.

Agricultural savings to benefit streams:

Senate Bill 14-023 sought to remove "use it or lose it" disincentives for irrigation efficiency improvements that could benefit streams. The bill would allow irrigators west of the Continental Divide who reduce water diversions through increased efficiency to transfer or lend the rights to the "saved" water to the state to benefit streams. It would also ensure that those rights are not legally abandoned. This would apply only to water that was not consumed under pre-efficiency practices, but rather lost in transit, and would be allowed only if it wouldn't damage someone else's water right.

Senate Bill 14-023 had a similar intent but ran into trouble in the 2013 session. The 2014 measure won much broader support. It was crafted through an extensive process of stakeholder consultations between environmental and agricultural interests, and it was ultimately passed by both the House and Senate. The bill remains controversial, however, due to concerns that it could deprive upstream junior water users of access to water no longer needed by downstream senior users, as well as concern that it would increase the amount of time and money water users have to spend defending their interests in water court. As of this writing, the bill had not yet been signed by Hickenlooper, and rumors were swirling that he was being

lobbied to veto it.

Phase out inefficient plumbing fixtures: Senate Bill 14-103 would phase out the sale of plumbing fixtures that don't meet the "WaterSense" standards for efficiency developed by the federal Environmental Protection Agency. It passed, but is still waiting for Hickenlooper's signature. Opponents say the bill inappropriately calls for a "one-size-fits-all" approach to conservation, wouldn't be effective and would limit consumer choice.

Flood Relief bills: These offered both money and regulatory streamlining. HB 14-1002 sought to appropriate \$12 million for a new grant program to repair water infrastructure damaged by a natural disaster. After bumping the amount up to \$17 million, the General Assembly passed the bill. HB 14-1005 sought to reduce legal hurdles for rebuilding irrigation diversions in cases where flooding changed the stream in such a way that the original diversion point would no longer work. The bill allows water-right holders to relocate a ditch headgate without filing for a change in water court, as would normally be required, as long as the change won't damage someone else's water right. The General Assembly passed the bill.

Flexible Water Markets: A bill seeking to make it easier for agricultural users to lease some of their water right to other

users as an alternative to permanent "buy and dry" did not fare well. HB 14-1026 would have allowed irrigators who free up water through following some land, deficit irrigation (giving crops less water than they really want) or planting less-thirsty crops to ask the state engineer for permission to change the use of that water without having to designate exactly what the new use will be. Water court wouldn't have been involved unless there was an appeal. The bill passed the House, but got hung up in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Natural Resources, & Energy.

You can trace the history of bills through the Legislature and see whether the governor has acted on them at <http://www.leg.state.co.us/>.

This is part of a series of articles coordinated by the Water Center at Colorado Mesa University in cooperation with the Colorado and Gunnison Basin Roundtables to raise awareness about water needs, uses and policies in our region. To learn more about the basin roundtables and statewide water planning, and to let the roundtables know what you think, go to www.coloradomesa.edu/WaterCenter. You can also find the Water Center on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/WaterCenterCMU> or Twitter at <https://twitter.com/WaterCenterCMU>.

Yampah grads thank school for believing they could succeed

58 turn tassels Friday at Glenwood Springs alternative high school

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GLENWOOD SPRINGS — Yampah Mountain High School graduate Gabriel Flores shared the story of a young student of Zen Buddhism who asked his master how long it would take to achieve the Zen state of total enlightenment, if he worked "hard" at it.

"Ten years," the master replied.

OK then, what if he concentrated even more and worked "really hard?" Flores continued.

"Twenty years," the master replied.

Taken aback, the student proceeded to ask how long it would take if he gave it every bit of his attention, only focusing on achieving that Zen state.

"Thirty years," the master replied.

The point being, Flores said, if you're so intentionally focused on one goal without an eye on the path that takes you there, "you forget that you're just trying to find yourself and to look for your future."

"Yampah gave me an opportunity to get to the 'me,' and I just needed someone to believe," Flores told his fellow Yampah classmates during the school's graduation ceremony Friday at the Glenwood Springs Community Center.

The alternative Yampah Mountain High graduated 58 students this year. The school is a collaborative effort among four area public school districts to give students who don't do well in the traditional high school setting another option to stay in school.

Among the graduates were 10 members of Yampah's Teen Parent Program, through which teenage mothers are provided child care at the school while they continue their academic learning and also learn important parenting skills.

"These students understand that their



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Kendall Landero is handed her diploma by Leigh McGown as Sally Kilton, right, with microphone, speaks about Landero's accomplishments during Yampah Mountain School graduation Friday at the Glenwood Community Center.

“Yampah gave me an opportunity to get to the ‘me,’ and I just needed someone to believe.”

Gabriel Flores
Yampah Mountain High School graduate

education is a better opportunity for their children,” program adviser Sally Kilton said before handing out diplomas to her graduates.

“I never thought I would have a chance to do this, being a mom,” said one of the teen parents, Katia Fisher. “Yampah gave me a

chance.”

From the playing of Pomp and Circumstance using kazoos to the individualized rainbow of different color caps and gowns for each of the graduates, Yampah's graduation is anything but traditional.

One by one, other graduates also took turns saying a few words of thanks to the school and its staff of teachers and advisers for giving them another opportunity to graduate high school.

Aaron Garland, a longtime on-again, off-again Yampah English teacher, gave the commencement address and spoke to

his passion for self-directed learning that reflects individual student interests.

“Your personalities are where your genius lies,” Garland said. “When you hear voices calling, listen to them ... and honor them with your curiosity.”

“You are the ones who can dream of something that isn't and make it happen,” he said.

Garland also dedicated his address, in part, to the memory of another longtime area teacher, Ruth Podmore, wife of Yampah teacher Mike Podmore, who died earlier this year from cancer.