News Statement

Western Resource Advocates Urges Senate Agriculture Committee To Pass House Bill 15-1259

Legalizing Residential Rain Barrels is Good Water Sense

COLORADO (April 16, 2015) - Drew Beckwith, Water Policy Manager, with Western Resource Advocates is testifying before the Colorado State Senate Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Energy Committee today to urge legislators to pass HB 15-1259, the Residential Rain Barrel bill sponsored by Representatives Esgar and Danielson and Senator Merrifield.

“Colorado is facing water challenges with a growing population, limited water supplies, and a changing climate. Water conservation is one of the cheapest, quickest strategies we can implement to help address these challenges. To ensure we all embrace water conservation to the fullest, we need an informed public.

Many people don’t know where the water in their taps comes from. They are experientially disconnected from the water cycle, insulated by a water plumbing system that always provides water when you turn on the tap – drought, rain, or shine. Rain barrels, however, will help an urban dweller connect to the natural cycles of rain and drought. Using a rain barrel will bring attention to how much water plants need to survive. Someone with a rain barrel develops a water cycle awareness and this easily transforms into a conservation mindset and appreciation not to waste this precious resource.

While rain barrels can raise great awareness of water conservation - they don’t use a great amount of water and will have no real impact on downstream water right holders. The average pair of household rain barrels could capture about 650 gallons of rainfall, enough to water a dozen tomato plants for the growing season. It is not enough, for example, to water the entire yard even once. In fact, a state-funded study demonstrates that nearly 100% of rainfall is evaporated off the ground or used up by plants, not making it downstream in any worthwhile quantity. Our river flows come predominantly from melting snow, not rain. So even if 10% of Coloradans had rain barrels that only adds up to 12 acre feet of water, compared to the 4.7 million acre-feet of water used by agriculture in our state. It’s less than a drop in the big picture bucket of water quantity.

Legalizing rain barrels is not about pitting urban interests against agricultural ones. Rain barrels are a pathway to increased water conservation consciousness that only serves to ease the pressure for transferring water out of farming, ranching, and Western Slope rivers. The more urban residents
embrace a fuller set of water conservation tactics, the less pressure there is to pull water from somewhere else.

Voting no keeps rain barrels illegal for residents, and plays into a mindset that keeps us mired in antiquated water wars. Colorado is the only state in the nation to prevent the use of rain barrels. Our similarly arid neighbors actually push for, and some even require, rain barrel use. The reason every other state has embraced this tool is because its common sense. Please pass HB 1259 - this bill benefits all regions and interests of our state.”

For the last 25 years Western Resource Advocates has been one of the West’s leading conservation groups protecting the region’s air, land and water. WRA’s lawyers, scientists and economists craft innovative solutions for the most complex natural resource challenges in the region. Go to www.westernresourceadvocates.org and follow us on Twitter @WRADV.