

## **NWCCOG QQ Summer Meeting    June 13, 2024    Steamboat Springs**

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### **Biography:**

Robert Sakata is the Colorado Department of Agriculture’s Ag Water Policy Advisor, a new position approved by the 2023 legislative session. He began his new position in January 2024. He will serve as a dedicated liaison between the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA) and other state agencies who work with agricultural stakeholders and will focus on building relationships with water organizations around the state while still acting as president of Sakata Farms in Brighton, Colorado.

Robert was born and raised in Colorado and grew up on his family farm. In addition to his lifelong farming experience, Robert has served in a wide range of agricultural and water focused positions beyond his farm. He currently serves on the Fulton ditch board of directors, one of the mutual irrigation ditches that his farm gets water from. He was appointed to serve on the Agriculture Groundwater Advisory Board, the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission, the InterBasin Compact Committee, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board (where he will remain active as the Agricultural Commissioner’s proxy when needed). He has also served on the Metro Basin Roundtable, Colorado Foundation for Water Education Board of Directors (now known as Water Education Colorado), and Colorado Water Congress Board of Directors. He has been active and served in leadership positions in numerous farm organizations, and he helped form both the Colorado Ag Water Alliance and the Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, where he served as the founding president.

Having grown up on the family farm, Robert attributes his hard work ethic and desire to serve the community from the inspirational example that his parents set as well as motivation to become involved in other areas. Robert is thrilled to be able to apply his farming experience in this new role with the Department of Agriculture, especially since food and water connect us all.

### **Why now for an Ag Water Policy Advisor?**

1. [USDA Ag Census Data](#)
  - a. Colorado’s irrigated acreage has decreased by over 30% (more than 1 million acres) over the last 25 year reporting period.
  - b. Colorado’s total farm expenses has increased by over 117% over the last 25 year reporting period while the national average was 17%
  - c. <https://www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus/>
2. [Colorado Climate Center Climate Change Report](#)
  - a. Statewide annual average temperatures warmed by 2.3°F from 1980 to 2022
  - b. By 2050 (the 2035-2064 period average), Colorado statewide annual temperatures are projected to warm by +2.5°F to +5.5°F
  - c. <https://climatechange.colostate.edu/>

3. [Continued Population growth](#);
  - a. Continued population growth in Colorado will increase water demands for municipal and industrial uses
  - b. <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/html/population.html>

### **Personal Goals for 2024**

1. Don't say no, listen, learn and share
2. Develop a water strategy for the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA)
3. Work to coordinate efforts with other agencies: CWCB, CDPHE, DWR
  - a. CDA Agency Action items in the Colorado Water Plan
    - i. [https://dnrweblink.state.co.us/CWCB/0/edoc/219188/Colorado\\_WaterPlan\\_2023\\_Digital.pdf](https://dnrweblink.state.co.us/CWCB/0/edoc/219188/Colorado_WaterPlan_2023_Digital.pdf)
    - ii. 2.1: Expand agricultural water conservation, education, and peer to peer programs that enhance innovation
    - iii. 2.2: Integrate capacity-building efforts to support agriculture
    - iv. 2.3 Expand the scale of collaborative water sharing agreements
      1. expanded opportunity created by SB24-197 for the Agricultural Water Protection Right
        - a. <https://cwcb.colorado.gov/agricultural-water-protection-right>
    - v. 2.4: Streamline collaborative water sharing agreement guidance across agencies
    - vi. 2.5: Support the integration of robust agriculture into local government planning
    - vii. 2.6: Assess the economic opportunities of avoided buy and dry to communities, ecosystems, and recreation
    - viii. 2.7: Engage federal and state partners to streamline assistance for groundwater dependent regions
    - ix. 2.8: Streamline agricultural infrastructure funding
    - x. 2.9 Assess agricultural impacts and best practices for water quality protection
    - xi. 2.10: Integrate soil health, water conservation, and adaptive practices that increase economic outputs with less water use.
  - b. Water Quality programs within CDA and CDPHE
    - i. Engage with the development of dredge and fill rules
    - ii. WQCD 319 Non-point source program
      1. <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/nonpoint-source-pollution-management>
    - iii. CDA Water Quality Protection Program
      1. <https://ag.colorado.gov/conservation/agricultural-water-quality>
    - iv. Green infrastructure study: SB24-037
  - c. DWR
    - i. Working with new State Engineer Jason Ullmann
    - ii. <https://dnr.colorado.gov/governor-polis-and-dnr-director-gibbs-announce-jason-ullmann-as-next-colorado-state-engineer>
4. Rural Mental Health (personal goal)

## **Water Topics I've heard traveling across the State**

1. Aging water infrastructure
2. Agriculture economic viability
3. Aurora purchase of 5,000 + acres in the lower Arkansas basin
4. Change of futile call administration
5. Colorado River Post 2026 negotiations
6. Division 6 implementation of the measurement rules
7. Dredge and Fill
8. Fulfillment of tribal water rights
9. Groundwater sustainability
10. Lower stream flows
11. Meeting water quality standards
12. Perkins County Canal
13. Postponement doctrine
14. Republican River Compact Compliance
15. ...
16. ...
17. ...

Thanks for the opportunity to join you for this Summer meeting. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions, comments, problems and or solutions.