

**ICMA Annual Awards Program
Community Partnership
Aurora Water – Youth Education Program**

Summary

Problem Assessment - As a semi-arid state, Colorado is subject to frequent droughts. In 2002, Colorado, along with much of the mid-west experienced a drought so severe Aurora's reservoirs and subsequent water supply were depleted to just 29 percent of capacity.

Since the severe drought, Aurora, Colorado residents have become keenly aware of the seriousness of the city's depleted water supply. Aurora's Water Conservation Program has played a large role in this effort, helping to educate residents about the importance of conservation and making the most of one of our most valuable resources.

Program Implementation - In 1998, Aurora Water took water education a step further by creating a Youth Education Program to help teach the next generation of water-users about the importance of not just conservation, but pollution prevention, where Aurora's water comes from, and how watersheds work to educate young citizens and immerse them in hands-on exploration of their watershed as a means of developing strong stewardship in our community. The Youth Education Program has five integrated components designed to provide in-depth opportunities to learn about water.

The program is free for Aurora schools and residents and offers choices for elementary, middle and high school levels, is grade specific and meets numerous Colorado State Standards. By learning about water in the classroom, in the field and then applying their newly discovered knowledge in a service learning project, Aurora's youth are empowered

to be stewards of their community and watershed, now and in the future.

The Youth Education program specifically includes:

Forests to Faucets – Forest to Faucets is a free, three-day interactive teacher training workshop, that provides teacher with the opportunity to explore Aurora's waters system and the South Platte watershed, starting in the forested headwaters, traveling through our urban and suburban community, and ending with a tour of our water treatment plants.

Experts explain our water management system, conservation resources such as the Aurora Xeriscape demonstration gardens, and educators spend a day conducting water quality monitoring and learning about watershed health and non-point source pollution. Teachers earn continuing education credit towards their teaching certification and walk away with the nationally recognized Project WET and Learning Tree curriculum guides, a water quality monitoring kit to use with their students and access to all of Aurora Water's education opportunities.

Classroom Presentations and Field Trips – The school-based programs offer several types of learning experiences including classroom presentations, school assemblies, field trips and tours of our water treatment facilities. The Aurora Water education team brings fun, water-related models, games and activities into the classroom where students learn about where their water comes from, how to prevent water pollution and the importance of water conservation.

Water Festival - Aurora Water was one of the first in Colorado to host a youth water festival. For more than 13 years, this one-day event has provided fifth grade students with environmental education opportunities full of fun, hands-on learning about watersheds, water pollution prevention and water conservation. The festival features more than 60

presentations and exhibits that cover a wide variety of water related topics. Students experience activities such as Instant Snowstorm, Mad Science, Fire Hydrant Painting, Wall of Water, Ph & Cal-C-Yum and Go with the Flow-stories and music about water. In addition to attending the festival, classes can become "Water Ambassadors" by completing six Colorado state standards-based lessons prior to attending the Festival.

AWQUA Lounge - The Aurora Water Quality Understanding and Appreciation (AWQUA) Lounge at Aurora Reservoir is a hands-on watershed education center and community resource for enhancing water quality awareness and understanding.

The AWQUA Lounge offers students an "underwater" immersion view for education concerning drinking water, stormwater, water conservation and aquatic habitats.

Visitors walk away with a greater appreciation for their water resources, the habitat it creates, the creatures (in addition to themselves) that are reliant upon a healthy watershed and the role Aurora residents have in protecting it.

Fostering Partnerships

The Aurora Water Youth Education Program continues to be a successful endeavor due to the many partnerships that are fostered between Aurora Water and the community.

The Forests to Faucets teacher training program is made possible with our partnership with the Coalition for the Upper South Platte. In 2006 the coalition provided in-depth information on the effects of wildfire on the South Platte watershed. Teachers were able to take a tour of burned forest areas and an experimental forest where wildfire mitigation research is taking place. Interpretive Rangers from the Aurora Parks and Open Space Department were also key partners in this program providing tours and helping teach participants how to do water quality monitoring with their students at Aurora Reservoir.

With their expertise Aurora Water was able to offer a rich experience for participants as we traveled with the water from our mountain watershed all the way to the City of Aurora.

Aurora Water depends on generous donations of time and resources to put together the Aurora Water Festival each year. The Community College of Aurora, one of our primary partners, provides staff and the use of their facilities. More than 140 people from a wide variety of organizations volunteered to participate in the festival in 2006 including the Bluff Lake Nature Center, the Bureau of Reclamation, the City of Westminster Utilities Department, the Coalition for the Upper South Platte, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the Colorado Foundation for Agriculture and the Colorado Wildlife Federation.

Program Budget

The Aurora Water Youth Education program operates within an annual budget of \$33,000, not including administrative staff.

Forests to Faucets Teacher Training	\$9,000
Youth Water Festival	\$8,500
Classroom Presentations & Field Trips - Supplies	\$5,000
Aurora Water’s Contribution to the AWQUA Lounge	\$500
Youth Ed Activity Booklet and Promotional Brochures	\$10,000

Effectiveness/Evaluation

To ensure Aurora’s Youth Education Program is meeting stated goals and objectives, teachers, special event volunteers, presenters, and exhibitors participating in our Water Festival, are given an evaluation survey after each event.

Interviews are also conducted with selected members of the Water Festival committee and presenters as well as a select group of educators. Evaluation forms are given to teachers after each classroom presentation or assembly program.

Qualitative evaluations such as information received through photographs, general observation, thank you letters and pictures from the students have also provided great input. Teachers and students have provided very positive feedback.

In 2006, over 1,000 students attended the Aurora Water Festival and six classes or 253 students participated in the Water Ambassador Program.

Each student that returned an evaluation form was able to tell us three new things they learned and a fact about their water in Aurora. The teacher training program was so successful a waiting list had to be established for the 2007 workshop. By implementing an evaluation plan, goals of increasing the level of understanding and awareness of watershed protection are being met.