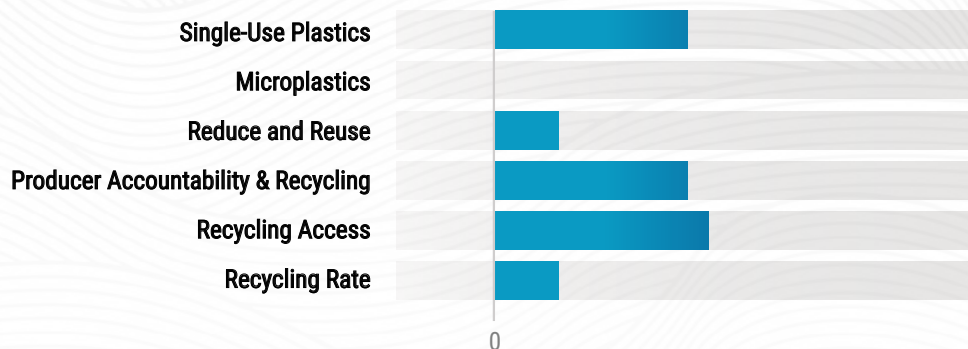


United States OF PLASTICS

Colorado

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Colorado may be far from the ocean, but its connection to watersheds and, by extension, the ocean is powerful. Colorado is home to the Rocky Mountains, where the Colorado River begins. This grand river flows over 1,400 miles through multiple states, supplying more than 40 million people, including 30 federally recognized Tribal nations, with water before leading to the ocean.¹ The survival of numerous threatened, endangered and migratory species is dependent on the river's health. Protecting the ocean starts upstream, and while Colorado has been a leader among inland states to address plastic pollution, there remain many opportunities for additional action.



¹ Sencan, G. and B. Gray. "The Colorado River." Public Policy Institute of California. March 2025.



Single-Use Plastics

Colorado restricts the use of expanded polystyrene foodware and single-use plastic carryout bags.² The state also became the first to repeal a previous law that prohibited local governments from regulating plastic materials or products.³



Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.



Reduce and Reuse

Although Colorado's extended producer responsibility (EPR) law does consider reuse in the fees producers will pay, it does not establish plastic source reduction or reuse targets. The state passed a law establishing the Colorado Circular Communities (C3) Enterprise, which funds projects that reduce material consumption, including through reuse and reduction.⁴



Producer Accountability and Recycling

Colorado has taken steps to hold producers accountable, with the state having passed an EPR law for packaging set to launch in 2026.⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

- While Colorado has made significant efforts to mitigate plastic pollution, the state should consider strengthening its reuse infrastructure as it implements an EPR program.
- Given the amount of beverage container-related pollution in the top ten most collected items in the state, Colorado should consider complementing its existing EPR law for packaging with a deposit return system (or bottle bill), which is known to immediately and significantly decrease beverage container pollution as well as overall litter.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

- 1 Cigarette Butts
- 2 Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
- 3 Beverage Cans
- 4 Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
- 5 Grocery Bags (Plastic)
- 6 Beverage Bottles (Glass)
- 7 Bottle Caps (Plastic)
- 8 Other Plastic/Foam Packaging
- 9 Take Out/Away Containers (Plastic)
- 10 Cups & Plates (Foam)

City Leadership

Cities throughout Colorado have stepped up as leaders in tackling plastic pollution. For example, Fort Collins pioneered a city-wide ban on single-use plastic bags as part of their broader "Zero Waste by 2030" goal, which helped lead to the statewide phase-out of these highly polluting single-use plastics.⁶ Boulder is building out a circular economy hub, run by local nonprofits Eco-Cycle and Resource Central, that will be home for reuse, recycling and innovation projects to reduce waste.⁷ Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Denver has switched to reusable cups for events to help minimize plastic pollution and waste.⁸ These city-level efforts demonstrate the power that local level actions can have on the environment and in leading the way towards more ambitious state actions.

² Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 25-17-501 et seq.

³ HB 21-1162, 2021 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2021).

⁴ HB 24-1449, 2024 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2024).

⁵ HB 22-1135, 2022 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2022); Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 25-17-701 et seq.

⁶ "Zero Waste." City of Fort Collins. Accessed May 2025.

⁷ "City of Boulder Hub for Reuse, Recycling & Innovation." City of Boulder. Accessed May 2025.

⁸ "Sustainability." Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre. Accessed May 2025.