

SDA NEWS

MARCH 2026

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The SDA Annual Regional Workshops are Headed Your Way!

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Designed by Emmett Jordan



Mark Your Calendars and Plan to Join Us... **The SDA Annual Regional Workshops are Headed Your Way in June with Information You Need!**

We are finalizing all the details, but we are once again hitting the road beginning in mid-June to bring you the ever-popular SDA Annual Regional Workshops!

These lively and educational trainings apply to all types of districts and are sure to provide a wealth of valuable information for your district. Whether you are a Board member or district employee, a seasoned professional or brand new to your position, we will have something for everyone.

We will cover a wide variety of important topics such as minutes, meeting formats, open meetings, conflicts of interest, public records, and of course our 2026 legislative update, just to name a few. We will also discuss establishing and developing a strong safety culture within your district. On top of all this, every attendee will receive a copy of the 2026 SDA Board Member Manual.

The workshops will be held between Friday, June 12 and Tuesday, June 23, and each session will run for approximately three and a half hours. **This year we will be visiting 10 locations around the state**, including Lakewood, Fountain, Parker, Kersey, North Denver, Granby, Vail, Buena Vista, Clifton, and Durango.

We have many more details to come so keep your eyes peeled for all the information as it becomes available. Watch your emails and the SDA website at www.sdaco.org. We will see you there!



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Don't Forget to Submit Your Ideas for Breakout Sessions for the 2026 SDA Annual Conference!

Now's the perfect time to share all your ideas for the 2026 SDA Annual Conference, September 15-17 at the Keystone Conference Center!

But, the deadline is Friday, March 20 so don't delay!

As you are thinking about what should be included in this year's breakout sessions, here are a few things that might help get those ideas flowing:

- » What are the hot topics that districts need to know more about?
- » Is there a general subject that you could use a refresher course on (and maybe others could, too)?
- » Are you an expert who has suggestions on important topics to present?

» Are there successful projects or case studies from which others could learn?

Whatever ideas you have, big or small, we want to hear from you!

And the best part is the process is super easy. Simply go to the SDA website at www.sdaco.org to share your suggestions for a breakout session, recommend a great speaker, or both!

As always, please call our office at 303-863-1733 if you have any questions.

Mark your calendars to join us in Keystone, and submit your ideas today!



Are You a Small District in Need of Funding Assistance for ADA Website Accessibility Costs?

Then make sure you check out our new grant program designed specifically to support small districts in creating ADA accessible websites!

Our program offers a one-time reimbursement of up to \$300 in costs for website accessibility services, including PDF conversions and/or remediations. Districts with operating budgets of \$250,000 or less are eligible, and one reimbursement is allowed per district.

"We know the hard work that has been dedicated to bringing websites and documents into compliance, and we are pleased to be able to assist with this process in any way we can," said Ann Terry, SDA's CEO.

For more information, including the reimbursement form, please visit our website at www.sdaco.org.



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Get to Know Megan Wagner, Our New Governmental Affairs Specialist

We were thrilled to have Megan Wagner, our new Governmental Affairs Specialist, join the SDA team on January 1. In her role, Megan is helping to lead our legislative analysis, support advocacy efforts at the State Capitol, and assist districts in navigating policy and regulatory issues.

Now that she's been with us for a few months, we wanted to check in with her to see how she's settling in to her new position. Read on to find out more!

SDA News: We are excited to have you join us with your many years of experience at the State Capitol. With this year's Legislative Session in full swing, how has your past experience with special districts helped now that your work is focused on advocating for districts across the state?

Megan: In my previous role, I worked for a Colorado-based public affairs firm for over 18 years. I progressed from being a Director of Client Services to Senior Lobbyist to VP of Government Relations. During this time, I lobbied for a special district that was often the focus of legislation. That experience taught me the importance of building strong relationships and providing ongoing education and outreach to legislators. I also learned how to clearly communicate a district's priorities and challenges, which is essential for effective advocacy. At SDA, I'm applying those lessons to represent districts across the state, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are understood in the legislative process.



Megan is helping to lead our legislative analysis, support advocacy efforts at the State Capitol, and assist districts in navigating policy and regulatory issues.



SDA News: What is one (or more) interesting facts about districts that you've learned in your time with SDA so far?

Megan: I've been impressed by the incredible variety of services that special districts provide, from conservation and water management to ambulance services and library operations. It's inspiring to see how these districts make tangible differences in communities of all sizes throughout Colorado.

SDA News: Following the Legislative Session, what do you look forward to most as you become more familiar with our districts and our members as a whole?

Megan: I'm excited to connect with SDA members and learn more about the successes and challenges their districts face. Gaining this firsthand understanding will help me advocate for policies that truly make a difference for communities across the state.

SDA News: Outside of work, what do you enjoy doing?

Megan: Outside of work, I take adult ballet classes at the Parker Arts Center, which is a fun way to stay active and creative. I also spend quality time with my husband, Ben, and our cat, Lucy.



How Northern Water Supports Special Districts in Saving Water and Reducing Costs

Guest article by Northern Water

Since 1937, Northern Water has planned and developed reliable water supplies for approximately 1.1 million people and more than 600,000 acres of agricultural land across northeastern Colorado. In partnership with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Northern Water jointly operates and maintains the Colorado-Big Thompson (C-BT) Project, which delivers Western Slope snowmelt across the Continental Divide to meet municipal, agricultural, industrial, and domestic water needs throughout northeastern Colorado.

In addition to long-term water supply infrastructure, Northern Water plays an active role in helping its allottees, including special districts, operate more efficiently; meet regulatory requirements; and reduce costs through water efficiency and water-loss reduction programs. These services are offered to district-owned facilities, including administrative buildings, treatment plants, parks, recreation areas, schools, and other public assets as well as their properties served by special districts that are located within the Northern Water service area.

Northern Water offers these programs **at no cost**, making them a valuable resource for special districts seeking to demonstrate stewardship of public funds while strengthening long-term water system resilience.

Supporting Special Districts with Compliance and System Performance

Municipal Water Loss Auditing Assistance

For special districts and utilities that provide drinking water, Northern Water offers technical assistance



Irrigation audits provide recommendations for using water more efficiently.



Northern Water hosts a Conservation Garden to demonstrate water efficient landscapes at its Berthoud campus.

with water loss auditing, a growing regulatory and operational priority.

Under Colorado law, covered entities serving more than 2,000 acre-feet of water are required to submit a water audit as part of their annual 1051 reporting. Water loss audits help districts and utilities:

- » Quantify water loss (i.e. leakage and non-revenue water)
- » Estimate and recover non-revenue water
- » Improve audit data accuracy
- » Help prioritize capital improvements and long-term planning

Northern Water staff work directly with district personnel to:

- » Assist with completing water loss audit data
- » Provide guidance on data collection and best practices
- » Help districts navigate audit requirements with confidence

For districts that have completed an audit, Northern Water also offers **Level 1 Water Audit Validation**.

This validation provides a second review of audit inputs in an effort to improve audit accuracy and document uncertainty about data validity. It also helps districts meet compliance obligations while strengthening operational decision-making. While not a state requirement, receiving validation is a good indicator of audit accuracy and may help when applying for related grants or state support.

Water Efficiency: A Growing Priority for Every Property

Rising utility costs, stricter sustainability requirements, and the need for resilient operations are driving organizations and government entities to evaluate water use. Many properties are replacing water-intensive Kentucky bluegrass with drought-tolerant turf, native plants, or other sustainable options. These changes conserve water and enhance property aesthetics while reducing long-term maintenance demands.

For property managers, proactive water management can translate into lower operating costs, predictable utility bills, and demonstrate sustainability. Northern Water provides a suite of **free services for both indoor and outdoor water efficiency** to help properties achieve these goals.



Properties in Northern Water's service area can receive an irrigation audit like this one.

Indoor Water Efficiency in Non-Residential Properties

Indoor water use within non-residential facilities such as administrative offices, treatment buildings, recreation centers, and community facilities presents significant savings opportunities.

Northern Water offers Commercial Indoor Water Assessments **at no cost** through a partnership with The Brendle Group. These assessments help properties:

- » Understand how water is used across facilities
- » Identify high-use processes and inefficiencies
- » Reduce operational costs without disrupting services

Each assessment includes:

- » Review of historical water use data
- » On-site walkthrough of district or commercial properties
- » A customized report with actionable recommendations
- » Free high-efficiency fixtures, where applicable
- » Temporary sub-metering to isolate specific water uses including leaks

These services are open to both special districts as well as the customers they serve. Ideal sites would be facilities with significant water use that are interested in better managing indoor use.

Outdoor Water Efficiency

Irrigation Assessments

A well-maintained irrigation system is essential to minimizing outdoor water waste. Northern Water partners with Resource Central to offer *Slow the Flow*, a free basic irrigation assessment for HOAs and commercial properties. These assessments help property managers identify system inefficiencies and develop practical strategies for water savings.

During a *Slow the Flow* assessment, Resource Central will:

- » Evaluate irrigation system health
- » Identify areas of water waste
- » Provide a roadmap for additional water-saving opportunities

For more complex properties, such as sites using non-potable water, ditch water, or that have advanced irrigation systems, Northern Water partners with Verdantas for *Advanced Irrigation Assessments*. These evaluations take into account the unique characteristics of commercial and municipal properties, offering tailored solutions to optimize efficiency while maintaining landscape quality.

Landscape Change Consultations and Grants

Updating landscapes with water-efficient plant material and designs is one of the most effective ways to conserve water. Not only does it save water, but switching from water intensive turfgrass to native

plants or lower water turf reduces maintenance costs, is more drought tolerant, and can enhance a property's value.

Northern Water provides free landscape consultations for large properties within its service area to showcase these benefits and help properties take the next step.

During a consultation, Northern Water staff will:

- » Discuss site-specific concerns
- » Review irrigation system performance
- » Review landscape design
- » Understand how the landscape is used
- » Provide ideas for water-efficient upgrades

The goal of these consultations is to provide guidance, reduce barriers, and help property owners make informed decisions about landscape improvements.

After a consultation, properties can apply for Collaborative Water-Efficient Landscape Grants **covering up to \$25,000 of project costs**. Applicants must provide at least 50 percent plant coverage and fund a matching amount. Grants are limited and awarded annually in December. Priority is given to projects that implement meaningful water-efficient upgrades that enhance both sustainability and curb appeal. Please go to www.northernwater.org to explore an interactive map of previous grant recipients, including before-and-after photos, to see the impact of these projects.

Getting Started

For more information about these various programs, please visit Northern Water's website at www.northernwater.org.

Property managers and special districts that take advantage of these resources can help ensure that their buildings and landscapes operate efficiently, remain visually appealing, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the region's water supply. 🌱



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Registration is Now Open for the 2026 Water Fluency Program!

Now in its 12th year, Water Education Colorado's Water Fluency Program is a professional development course designed for anyone interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of Colorado water management and protection. This includes non-water professionals in leadership roles intersecting with water as well as water professionals who are newer to the field or the state of Colorado or who want to gain a broader view of the issues beyond their unique niche.

This comprehensive program provides an opportunity for participants to learn about water through five program days with highly sought-out lectures, discussions, exclusive access to water sector leaders, breakout networking opportunities, and much more.

The program's curriculum covers statewide water topics blended with local examples from around the state that provide current examples of innovative water practices.

More specifically, the curriculum includes:

- » **Colorado's water resources:** basic hydrology, the role of water in society, the economic value of water, ties to public policy, and emerging issues
- » **Legal and institutional frameworks:** water law and administration, project planning and approval, interbasin projects, and agreements
- » **Water resource management:** watershed health, environmental protection, water quality, and natural disasters
- » **Colorado water for the future:** assessing supply and meeting demand, ecosystem values, conservation and land use, alignment of resources, growing populations, varied climates and policies

This year the program will be showcasing water management examples from the South Platte River Basin, and participants from across Colorado will benefit from the content (not just people from the class location area).

Below are the session dates for this year, with classes held both virtually and in-person:

- » Session 1: May 13 (virtual)
- » Session 2: June 24 (virtual)
- » Session 3: July 21 – 22 (2 in-person days in the South Platte River Basin/Front Range)
- » Session 4: September 2 (virtual)

The Water Fluency Program is designed so anyone who is interested in learning more about water can participate. There will be pre-session homework that will bring someone coming from any knowledge level up to speed and prepared to engage in the classroom program days.

The typical Water Fluency Program participant is involved with making decisions about water but does not necessarily have a focused background in water issues. Examples of past participants are special district staff and Board members; city/county staff; elected officials; someone new to Colorado water but who has worked in water in other states; interested community members; business leaders; educators; and more!

On top of all of this, SDA is offering five partial scholarships for our members to participate!

For more details on the program, the available scholarships, and to register, please visit Water Education Colorado's website at www.watereducationcolorado.org. From there, please go to the Programs and Events tab at the top and then choose "Water Fluency."



SDA  Leadership Academy

Join Us in Welcoming the 2026 Leadership Academy Fellows!

This year's Leadership Academy is well underway, and we are thrilled to welcome our new class of Leadership Fellows!

Name	Title	District/Organization
Kelsey Anderson	Chief Plant Operator	Silverthorne Dillon Joint Sewer Authority
Miriam Andolini	Board President	Deer Mountain Fire Protection District
Sebastian Arulraj	Account Manager	Highstreet Insurance and Financial Services
Bryce Burget	Associate Director	CEBT/WTW
Michelle Byers	District Administrator	Dominion Water & Sanitation District
Diana Cantu	Procurement Officer	Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District
Karis Clark	Assistant District Manager	Public Alliance
Trisha Conway	Human Resources Manager	Eaton Area Park and Recreation District
Mallory Craig	Of Counsel—Attorney	Spencer Fane LLP
Danielle Daigle-Chavez	District Manager	WSDM—Managers
Sean Dearborn	Superintendent of Water and Sewer	Meridian Service Metropolitan District
Jake Downing	District Compliance & Operations Administrator	Pinnacle Consulting Group, Inc.
Angela Eckle	Special District Paralegal	Cockrel Ela Glesne Greher & Ruhland, P.C.
Chloe Edens	Paralegal	WBA, P.C.
Rich Fischer	Business Development Manager—Mountain Region	GovDeals
Scott Fossberg	Project & Planning Supervisor	Cordillera Metro District
Mitch Freund	Operations Director	Colfax Ave Business Improvement District
Taylor Giarritano	Assistant Manager	St. Vrain Sanitation District
Ayden Gillund	Public Works Director	Colorado City Metropolitan District
Mike Golden	Vice Chairperson	Three Lakes Water and Sanitation District
Kylie Gregg	Office Manager	Rio Grande Water Conservation District
Greg Hansen	Director—Investment Services	COLOTRUST

Name	Title	District/Organization
Emily Harkness	Special District Election Coordinator	Colorado Department of Local Affairs—Division of Local Government
Cindy Heesemann	Administrative Specialist	Front Range Fire Rescue
Todd Heintl	Deputy Chief of Administration	West Metro Fire Protection District
Ashley Hernandez-Schlagel	Partner	Collins Cole Winn & Ulmer, PLLC
Danielle Hutchinson	Executive Administrative Assistant	Sterling Ranch Community Authority Board
Jennifer Jackse	Senior Manager, Accounts & Business Dev.	QP Services
Darryle Johnson	Director of Roads and Open Space	Forest Lakes Metro District
Kenneth Josselyn	Deputy Chief of Operations	Aspen Fire Protection District
Jill Kleven	Director of Technical Services	Pueblo City-County Library District
Justin Lemme	IT Manager	Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District
Steve Matzl	Director—Grand Valley Recreation Center	Parachute Battlement Mesa Park and Rec District
Kimberly Maxson	Administration Manager	Fremont Sanitation District
Alissa McCartney	Board of Directors	Cimarron Hill Fire Protection District
Beau McMahon	District Manager	Brightstar District Management
Riley Meggers	Assistant Manager	Community Resource Services of Colorado (CRS)
Brennan Mendus	Risk Control Consultant	Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool
Glenton Muller	Board President	Murphy Creek Metropolitan District 3
Ed Pankievicius	Chief Plant Operator	Copper Mountain Consolidated Metropolitan District
Gary Potter	Water Delivery and Treatment Manager	Triview Metropolitan District
Zachary Rhea	Operator Lead	Upper Blue Sanitation District
Kylie Richon	Program Manager	Downtown Colorado, Inc
Misael Rodriguez	Area Operations Manager	Ramey Environmental Compliance
Anna Salim	VP Operations and Programming	Downtown Boulder Business Improvement District
Christina Sandoval	Vice President	Timberline District Consulting
Tahlia Sayers	Board President	Marvella Metro District
Jack Seward	District Manager	Kremmling Sanitation District
Stephen Sheffield	Assistant District Manager	Triview Metropolitan District
Denise Sivetts	Benefits Administrator II	Fire & Police Pension Association of Colorado
Chad Tate	Director of Utilities	Baca Grande Water and Sanitation District
Rachel Vermeal	Vice President	Coal Creek Canyon Park and Recreation District

Our kickoff event was held on February 25 at Hyland Hills Golf Course and featured an inspiring keynote presentation from Brandon Young of Applied Leadership Partners (many of you may have seen Brandon speak at last year’s Annual Conference).

Brandon’s presentation, entitled “Foundations of Leadership,” equipped the group with essential insights into the meaning of leadership, strategies for effective preparation in future roles, and served as the perfect launching point for an exciting year of growth

for our Fellows.

“The 2026 Leadership Academy is comprised of a wide range of leaders from an array of different districts and organizations from across Colorado,” said SDA CEO, Ann Terry. “With such varied backgrounds and experiences, this group has an amazing opportunity to connect and learn from one another as they focus on developing their leadership skills. We can’t wait to see where the year takes them!” 🍌



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March 31 is the Deadline to Submit Videos for the Districts Make the Difference Contest!

It's once again time for students to get out in the community, learn about their local special districts, and create an engaging and informative video highlighting those districts! And did we mention there are cash prizes available for the winners?

This annual student video contest is operated through the National Special Districts Association's public awareness campaign called "Districts Make the Difference." The contest is geared towards high school students and is designed to encourage young people to engage with local government and enhance their civics education.

For the competition, high school students (grades 9-12) are asked to submit a fun, educational, and short video (60 seconds max) that provides a glimpse into the essential services provided by districts and highlights the ways special districts "Make the Difference" in their local communities.

The top ten finalists will be chosen by a panel of judges from Districts Make the Difference. From there,

public voting will determine the final winners who will be awarded the following scholarships:

- » \$2,000 for the first-place winner
- » \$1,000 for the second-place winner
- » \$500 for the third-place winner

In addition, \$500 will be awarded to each winning student's teacher of choice!

"This video contest fosters an awareness of local government at a young age and encourages students to gain an understanding of the vital role special districts play in their communities," said SDA CEO and NSDA Board Chair Ann Terry.

Please visit <https://www.districtsmakethedifference.org/video-contest> to watch past years' video submissions and learn more about the guidelines for this year's contest.

The deadline to submit videos is March 31, 2026 so don't delay! 📅



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Guest article by the Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool

The Colorado Special Districts Property and Liability Pool remains committed to our more than 2,500 public entities as *Your Risk Management Partner*. Each month, we are focusing on a different program or service we offer our membership, either at no cost or at a discounted rate.

This month, we're highlighting our hazard recognition consultation and training services, which allow us to help members evaluate potential hazard risks and make recommendations that provide security and knowledge where it's needed most—all at no cost.

Our safety experts are passionate about **helping members develop policies, practices, and implementation procedures** on site, through email, or over the phone. The best part? It's ***all included*** in your membership.

Hazard Recognition

Our on-site hazard recognition consultations focus on **identifying slip, trip, and fall risks before they become injuries**. Make sure you and your staff know what to do in order to prevent the next emergency or workplace crisis. To get started:

- » Visit **csdpool.org/request-a-safety-consultation**
- » Enter your information and select "Hazard Recognition"
- » One of our safety experts will reach out to discuss your specific needs

To learn more, visit our website at **www.csdpool.org/safety-consulting**.

As *Your Risk Management Partner*, we remain committed to providing specialized coverages tailored for public entities, exemplary claims support, and safety and loss prevention services to ensure everyone within the organization—from Board members to supervisors and staff—has the tools they need to succeed. If you have any questions about the resources mentioned here, please visit **csdpool.org** or message us at **csdpool.org/connect**.

Exemption from Audit

Application Deadline is March 31

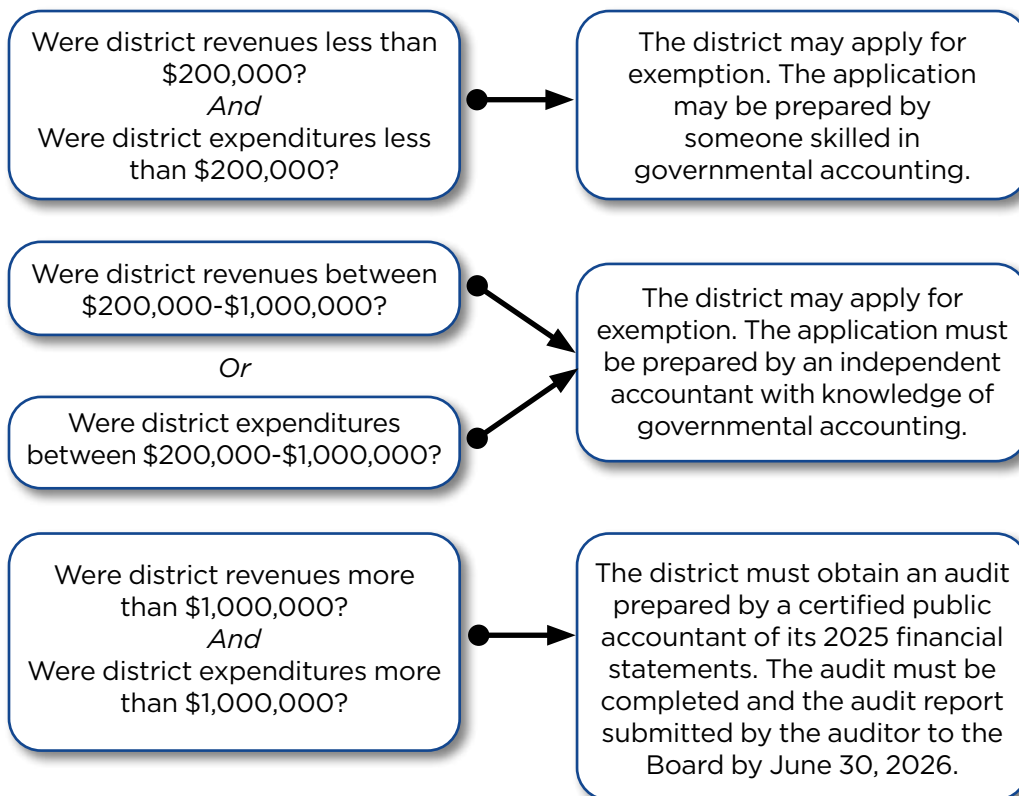
Special district financial statements must be audited annually by a CPA, unless you apply for and are granted an exemption from audit by the State Auditor. The application deadline is March 31, 2026, and failure to file the application for exemption from audit will cause the district to lose its exemption for fiscal years 2025 *and* 2026.

According to the Colorado Local Government

Audit Law,¹ the application for exemption must be personally reviewed, approved, and signed by a majority of the members of the district Board of Directors.

Below is a rubric to see if your district may apply for an exemption from audit.

¹ Title 29, Article 1, Part 6, C.R.S.



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