

## Historic Milestone Secures Future of the High Line Canal

*Denver Water Transfers 45 Miles of Iconic High Line Canal to Arapahoe County, Securing its Future with Conservation Easement held by the High Line Canal Conservancy*

**June 20, 2024** – Denver, CO – In a groundbreaking move to protect the historic 71-mile High Line Canal, one of the nation’s longest continuous urban trails, Denver Water announces the transfer of 45 miles of the beloved High Line Canal to Arapahoe County, and with it, a conservation easement that permanently protects the Canal as a natural open space for the region. This visionary action marks the end of a century-long stewardship by Denver Water and ushers in a new chapter for the historic water delivery system, now one of the region’s treasured urban trails meandering through 11 governmental jurisdictions.

Effective this month, the High Line Canal Conservancy will hold and manage a conservation easement for this 45-mile stretch, safeguarding it for future generations. This easement will ensure the Canal will forever be maintained as a public linear open space park and trail while protecting the Canal's unique conservation values, including preserving the natural environmental beauty and public recreational benefits of this cherished greenway and preventing future development, while continuing stormwater management and public utility uses.

The collaborative agreement between Denver Water, Arapahoe County, and the High Line Canal Conservancy marks a significant advancement toward the community vision to honor, enhance and repurpose this landmark of our agricultural heritage, a 71-mile irrigation canal, into one of our region’s premier green spaces connecting neighborhoods, people and nature.

“This historic milestone represents a major step forward in the ongoing transformation of the High Line Canal,” said Tom Roode, Chief Operations and Maintenance Officer at Denver Water. “This very positive evolution of the Canal reflects Denver Water’s mission to advance public health and water conservation while ensuring the Canal is protected for generations to come.”

While Denver Water is transferring ownership of more than half of the Canal to Arapahoe County, the water provider will continue to own nearly 20 miles of the Canal during the transformation process. Maintenance of the corridor is a collaboration between Denver Water, the counties, local jurisdictions and the Conservancy.

“For decades, the High Line Canal has been an important and well used recreational asset for Arapahoe County residents, making this ownership transfer a natural fit for our open spaces, parks and trails portfolio,” said Arapahoe County Commissioner and Board Chair Carrie Warren-Gully. “Our work to preserve natural and legacy spaces will be greatly expanded through the conservation easement, ensuring the greenway remains a treasured asset for generations.”

Trail users will not see a dramatic difference from the ownership change; however, over time care for the natural resources will improve under county ownership. The Canal trail will always remain free to use the Canal for hiking, biking, horseback riding and enjoying the outdoors; and the Conservancy will continue to be a central point of contact for any inquiries.

“Denver Water’s protection of the Canal through a Conservation Easement demonstrates tremendous foresight and partnership. The easement is a lasting gift that will forever improve the quality of life in the Denver region for the hundreds of thousands of people who use the Canal today and for generations to come,” said Harriet Crittenden LaMair, CEO, High Line Canal Conservancy. “All of us at the High Line Canal Conservancy - our board, staff and volunteers - are so honored to accept this responsibility.”

The Conservancy, Denver Water, and Arapahoe County in collaboration with local governments spent years completing a comprehensive plan that recommends investments and management changes to support the long-term transition of the Canal from a water delivery function to a protected, regional open space and trail with multiple environmental and recreational benefits.

“Denverites already know the High Line Canal as one of the best places to run, hike, and bike. The work being done here will ensure future generations know it, as well,” said Mayor Mike Johnston. Jolon Clark, Executive Director of Denver Parks and Recreation also remarked, “With over a million users each year, the High Line Canal is a vital part of our parks and trail system within the City & County of Denver. For decades we have been deeply engaged and have invested in the preservation and enhancement of the High Line Canal. We look forward to fostering our partnerships to ensure that the High Line Canal remains a cherished recreational and natural resource for Denver residents.”

The long-term protection of the Canal will require ongoing public and private funding. The High Line Canal Conservancy is working toward that as they near the close of a transformational \$33 million campaign, Great Lengths for the High Line, that is leveraging public funding for a total investment of \$100 million in the Canal over 5 years.

“We are thrilled with the incredible support the Great Lengths campaign has received from across the region, including a generous \$10 million investment from Denver Water and \$7 million from Great Outdoors Colorado,” said Paula Herzmark, Board Chair of the High Line Canal Conservancy. “With the new ownership and conservation easement in place, Arapahoe County, the High Line Canal Conservancy, and Denver Water have collectively secured the Canal’s future. This ensures that it will be here as an essential natural open space, free and accessible to the public forever.”

Great Outdoors Colorado also provided funding to the Conservancy to support the creation of the conservation easement, including a present conditions report and the establishment of an endowment that will support ongoing monitoring and enforcement of the easement.

### **About Denver Water**

Denver Water proudly serves high-quality water and promotes its efficient use to 1.5 million people in the city of Denver and many surrounding suburbs. Established in 1918, the utility is a public agency funded by water rates, new tap fees and the sale of hydropower, not taxes. It is Colorado’s oldest and largest water utility. Subscribe to TAP to hydrate your mind, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

### **About Arapahoe County**

Arapahoe County provides the best of everything Colorado has to offer. From babies to boomers and beyond, residents put down roots, raise families, start and run businesses, and embrace the endless opportunities and amenities that make the state unique. Arapahoe County spans 805 miles and features vibrant urban, suburban and rural communities, an unparalleled open space and trail system, major employment centers and a robust multimodal transportation network. Learn more at [arapahoeco.gov](http://arapahoeco.gov). (Chris)

### **About High Line Canal Conservancy**

The High Line Canal Conservancy is a tax-exempt nonprofit formed in 2014 by a passionate coalition to provide leadership and harness the region’s commitment to enhancing and permanently protecting the High Line Canal. With support from each jurisdiction and in partnership with Denver Water, the Conservancy is leading a collaborative and region-wide effort to ensure the Canal is protected and enhanced for generations. Visit [HighLineCanal.org](http://HighLineCanal.org) for more information.