

Nonpoint Source Concept Paper
Watershed Planning on the Yampa River
Submitted by Friends of the Yampa
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Introduction

The Yampa River watershed is known throughout Colorado as a relatively high-quality watershed, but as land-uses change, water demand increases, and natural events occur, such as forest beetlekill, balancing the uses and needs for water and protecting water quality requires more coordination among stakeholders. With guidance from the Colorado Watershed Assembly, a non-profit Watershed Group in the Yampa Valley, The Friends of the Yampa, has offered to sponsor this proposed watershed planning effort with numerous water-related organizations, agencies, and stakeholders within the Yampa Valley to develop a Yampa River watershed plan that will address non-point source water quality issues and its management throughout the Basin. Friends of the Yampa is a 501(c) (3) organization founded in 1983 in Steamboat Springs, Colorado that has been organizing and assisting in river related projects, advocacy, education, policy efforts and river related events since its inception. The Friends of the Yampa’s mission is “to protect and enhance the river’s environmental and recreational integrity through stewardship, advocacy, education and partnerships”. A watershed plan that meets the EPA’s 9 Elements will provide the framework for achieving these goals by coordinating stakeholders and identifying specific needs and projects that will promote and protect water quality within the basin.

Kelly Bedell is working with Friends of the Yampa to coordinate efforts among the various stakeholders in the Valley. Previously, she worked to establish the Morgan Bottom Watershed Group in Hayden . That group has chosen to focus on issues specific to that area of the Yampa but will participate in the larger effort for watershed planning. Kelly has been influential in bringing Peabody Coal to the table and has led the efforts to coordinate a stakeholder process that includes industry, agriculture, recreation, water providers and local government.

Therefore, Friends of the Yampa and partnering organizations are exploring funding opportunities to develop the proposed Yampa River Watershed Plan—319 Watershed Planning funds are exactly what the group needs to expand its current efforts and transition into development of a full watershed plan. Potential activities discussed included data sharing; compilation of existing studies and other pertinent data; resource sharing; public awareness; education and outreach; integration of land use and water resource planning; the development of restoration projects and monitoring of both water quality and implementation projects. Note also that this Watershed Plan will integrate the HB-05-1177 Statewide

Water Supply Initiative Report for the Yampa/White/Green Basin and the Proposed Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District Master Plan.

Friends of the Yampa and its partners are committed to developing a comprehensive watershed plan for the Yampa Valley that includes all stakeholders in the valley. Other organizations that have participated in watershed planning and related projects in the basin include:

- Community Agriculture Alliance
- Upper Yampa Conservancy District
- Routt County
- City of Steamboat Springs
- Moffat County
- City of Craig
- Town of Hayden
- US Forest Service
- Trout Unlimited
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- Various ditch companies
- Routt County Conservation District
- Peabody Energy
- BLM
- Colorado Div of Water Resources
- Yampa River Legacy Project
- Tamarisk Coalition
- Yampa Valley Partners
- The Nature Conservancy
- Yampa/White Roundtable
- NRCS
- Individual landowners
- Colorado Stake Parks
- CSU Extension

Nonpoint Source Water Quality Problem

The following stream segments are listed on the 303(d) list--Elkhead Reservoir and Lake Catamount are listed for aquatic life; Bushy Creek is listed for sediment; the Elkhead Creek below Morin Ditch is listed for E. Coli; Dry Creek below Seneca Site 8 and Sage Creek below RCR 51D are both listed for Selenium; and Dry Creek is listed for Iron (Trec). The following stream segments are listed on Colorado's Monitoring and Evaluation list—The Yampa River below Stagecoach Reservoir is listed for Manganese and Selenium; Stagecoach Reservoir and Little White Snake Creek are listed for Dissolved Oxygen; the Yampa River from Oak Creek to Elkhead Creek is listed for temperature; Walton Creek is listed for Manganese; Little Morrison Creek is listed for Zinc and Iron; Lost Dog Creek is listed for mercury; and Dry Creek below RCR 53 is listed for lead and E. coli. There are no known TMDL implementation plans ongoing.

In addition to the listed segments, accelerated bank erosion, loss of native riparian vegetation, historic coal mining, oil and gas development, road and residential construction, forest beetlekill, wildland fire, and various land-use practices in the Yampa Valley are potentially contributing nonpoint source pollution in the Yampa River and its tributaries. Non-profit organizations, such as the Friends of the Yampa and Trout Unlimited, government agencies, such as the City of Steamboat Springs, Routt County, Moffat County, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the NRCS, the Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District, the US Forest Service, etc., individual landowners and industrial operators have attempted implementing various Best Management Practices (BMP) and riparian restoration/bank stabilization

projects in an effort to mitigate identified water quality impacts on the Yampa River watershed, but stakeholders in this area agree that a well thought out, consolidated and holistic plan to coordinate these efforts and to address stream and riparian management is badly needed.

Where is the problem?

The Friends of the Yampa and its partners are addressing watershed issues for the Yampa River and its tributaries from its confluence with the Green River up to its headwaters, including Elkhead Creek and the Elk River (Routt and Moffat Counties.) The Tamarisk Coalition would like to see the boundaries of the plan include the White, the Green and the Little Snake watersheds but stakeholders are concerned about over-extending the limits. Advice from the NPS Section during Consultation Day would be appreciated.

How will the project address the nonpoint source problem?

The watershed plan will define and map the boundaries of the watershed, compile existing data on water quality and morphological conditions, identify data gaps, recommend and prioritize implementation projects to improve water quality and address the 9 elements of EPA approved watershed plan by:

- identifying current and future sources of selenium, iron, manganese, zinc, lead, and sediment load;
- identifying strategies to reduce temperatures in the Yampa River;
- identifying sources of E. coli and proposing mitigation efforts;
- identifying nutrient sources and planning for future regulations;
- identifying water storage needs that will help maintain the balance between water quality and water needs;
- load reduction strategies, their likely impact, and milestones to load reduction;
- quantifying the technical and financial resources required to sustainably implement load reduction strategies;
- identifying partnering agencies and organizations involved in each assessment, remediation, or maintenance effort;
- describing water quality monitoring and load reduction evaluation.

As a part of this process the existing stakeholder will reach out to additional potential stakeholders to expand collaboration and partnerships and develop a stronger understanding of the needs of other stakeholders.

There is a strong agreement among the existing stakeholders that a comprehensive education component is needed. This watershed plan will put considerable resources into developing a series of community workshops and watershed tours by utilizing the resources of several partners including the Community Agricultural Alliance of Routt County, CSU Extension, The Nature Conservancy, the Colorado

River Water Conservation District, the Colorado Foundation for Water Education and the Colorado Watershed Assembly.

How will we demonstrate or measure the project’s success in addressing the problem?

Success will be measured by an increase in participants in the collaborative process of watershed planning, the formation of steering committee that will guide the watershed planning process, and attendance in the watershed education process. Project outputs will include a watershed plan agreed to by the stakeholders that addresses nonpoint source pollution in the watershed and the 9 essential elements of a watershed plan. The outcomes of this plan will be the implementation of projects that result in a reduction of nonpoint source pollution, increased monitoring efforts, and a collaborative effort by landowners and land-use agencies to employ sustainable land use practices.

Budget

See separate document