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Office of the City Manager

February 21, 2012

VIA FACSIMILE & U.S. MAIL

Ms. Jennifer Gimbel
Director
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203

Re: Request for Instream Flow Appropriation - Arkansas River

Dear Ms. Gimbel:

I am writing on behalf of the City of Pueblo to recommend and request that the Colorado Water Conservation Board ("CWCBC") appropriate an instream flow water right for the segment of the Arkansas River between the outlet of Pueblo Reservoir and the Arkansas River - Fountain Creek confluence in Pueblo County.¹ This approximately 10-mile segment of the Arkansas River has been the subject in recent years of extensive restoration and rehabilitation activities in conjunction with Pueblo's Arkansas River Legacy Project (the "Legacy Project") which is intended to restore fish and wildlife habitat and the natural environment of the River.

As described in the information sheet enclosed as Exhibit 1, the most significant phases of the Legacy Project are complete, and year-round protection of a minimum flow level is now necessary to reasonably protect the restored natural environment. Pursuant to Rule 5.a. of the CWCBC's Instream Flow Program Rules, Pueblo recommends that the CWCBC appropriate a new 100 cfs instream flow water right for this segment of the Arkansas River. We have confirmed that Colorado Parks & Wildlife ("CPW") will join in and support this request and recommendation.

The Legacy Project was undertaken jointly by Pueblo and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the "Corps"), with substantial funding from the Corps and Great Outdoors Colorado, and cash or in-kind contributions from 22 other local project partners, including Pueblo County and the Pueblo Conservancy District. Phase 1 of the Legacy

¹ This segment is located in Water District 10, Water Division 2 (Arkansas River basin) and shown on U.S.G.S. topographic maps named Northwest Pueblo and Northeast Pueblo.

Project was completed in 2005, and involved substantial improvements to the River between Pueblo Dam and the Fountain Creek confluence, including the installation of approximately 200 boulder cluster and similar habitat structures; an ongoing program for the removal of more than 140 acres of invasive, non-native riparian species, and replacement plantings with native species; the construction of a fish ladder/boat chute to allow kayaks and other recreational water craft, and native and sport fish, to pass over an existing 13-foot high diversion structure in the river; and the construction of seven smaller, permanent water-controlling drop structures that create self-scouring pools and control the flow of the river at specific points to create wave features for recreational boating.

The controlled movement of water resulting from the various new in-stream structures enhances stream oxygen levels. In addition, the pools created by the water control structures provide important restorative aquatic habitat, similar to the natural environment that once existed in this reach, by facilitating migration within the river, by establishing locations protected from variations in water flow levels and by moderating stream temperature fluctuations. As shown on the list prepared by the Colorado Division of Wildlife ("DOW"), enclosed as Exhibit 2, DOW reported in 2005, that fish existing in this reach of the river include native species of environmental importance as well as sport fish, such as walleye, saugeye and trout, which have either been stocked or escaped from Pueblo Reservoir. The improved aquatic habitat and fishery in this reach of the Arkansas River was also featured in an article of the September-October 2005 edition of DOW's *Colorado Outdoors* magazine, a copy of which is enclosed as Exhibit 3.

Since the first phase of the project was completed a ½-mile long river park has been constructed along the west bank of the Arkansas River south of 4th Street and north of the Union Avenue bridge. The City is currently partnering with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to add additional in-stream fishery habitat structures from below Pueblo Dam 7.1 miles downstream to the confluence of the Arkansas River and Wildhorse Creek. The project will include the installation of approximately 64 boulder vanes, 36 sets of boulder clusters, eight boulder j-hooks, and nine bank stabilizing habitat trees. The \$300,000 project is planned to be completed in between November 2012 and February 2013. Since 2005, the City of Pueblo has completed ongoing inspection and maintenance activities related to the in-stream habitat improvements and riparian revegetation completed in the first phase Arkansas River Legacy Project. The additional in-stream habitat improvements are identified in the 2012-2016 City of Pueblo proposed capital improvement plan

The long-term aquatic habitat benefits of the Legacy Project are significant. Recent fishery data and evaluations by DOW confirm the significance and health of the fishery, including a strong presence of rainbow and brown trout. See *Arkansas River Sampling, Methods and Preliminary Data Report*, November 17-18, 2011, enclosed as Exhibit 4. The contribution of juvenile rainbow trout to the fishery in this reach will be the subject of future DOW studies. *Id.* at p. 7. This reach has become increasingly

Ms. Jennifer Gimbel
February 21, 2012
Page 3

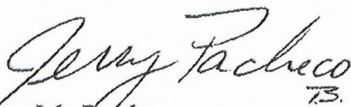
recognized as a top fly-fishing destination, as described in the February 21, 2012 article in the Pueblo Chieftain, a copy of which is enclosed as Exhibit 4.

In April 2006, Pueblo obtained a final Water Court decree in Case No. 01CW160 (Water Div. 2) for a recreational in-channel diversion water right ("RICD water right") for water control structures which were planned, and which have since been constructed, as part of the initial phase of the Legacy Project. The RICD water right is decreed for "[b]oating, including but not limited to kayaking, rafting, and canoeing." The decree also recognizes that the RICD water right will be used for "incidental fishing, wildlife habitat, and piscatorial uses," although a water right for such purposes was not confirmed by the decree. Pueblo will file a Water Court application in April 2012 requesting that the RICD water right be made absolute or, in the alternative, continued as conditional for another six-year diligence period.

Pueblo officials believe strongly that the improved fish and wildlife habitat resulting from the Legacy Project activities should have an additional level of protection against future flow reductions. An instream flow water right at the recommended level of 100 cfs is necessary to protect this restored natural environment to a reasonable degree. It is not intended that any instream flow water right be "stacked" on the RICD water right; instead, it is Pueblo's expectation and request that the RICD water right and any new instream flow water right exist contemporaneously in whatever amount of flow is ultimately claimed.

Please feel free to contact me, or Tom Florczak of the office of the Pueblo City Attorney, with any immediate questions you may have concerning this letter or if additional information from Pueblo would be helpful to the CWCB or its staff. In addition, Pueblo representatives would be pleased to meet with you and other CWCB staff members to discuss and answer questions concerning the request. Please let us know if you would like to schedule such a meeting. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,


Jerry M. Pacheco
City Manager

cc: Mark Uppendahl, CPW
Pueblo City Council
Tom Florczak
Chris Thorne

Pueblo Arkansas River Corridor Legacy Project

Summary Information

PUEBLO ARKANSAS RIVER CORRIDOR PROJECT

Phase 1: June/2002-June/2005

- 6) **Greenway & Nature Center of Pueblo** - Outdoor facility improvements, Raptor Center improvements, and revegetation of the riverbanks and plaza area.
- 7) **Pueblo Zoo** - Funding for the Colorado River Otter Exhibit located adjacent to Monkey Mountain and the historic structures at the zoo;
- 8) **Environmental Education Sites** - Improve two (2) environmental education sites on the western end of Lake Pueblo Wildlife Area managed by the Colorado Division of Wildlife;

Phase 2: (Future Phase) June/2005 - June/2008

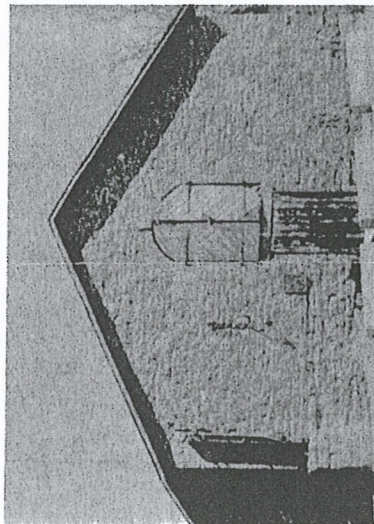
- 1) **Recreational Trails** - Completion of a trail connection to the St. Charles Mesa community and construction of a 1.5-mile section of the Arkansas River Trail east of the City of Pueblo. Construct a trail from the Arkansas River through City Park to the Pueblo Zoo. Acquisition and trail construction of a 2-mile section of the Union Pacific rail spur linking City Park to the "Chain of Lakes" with 250' pedestrian bridge connecting to the Greenway & Nature Center.
- 2) **Environmental Education Curriculum** - Develop a system-wide Environmental Education curriculum that synthesizes the existing curriculum programs into a comprehensive environmental education curriculum that will be used by primary and secondary teachers within School District #60 and School District #70. The environmental education curriculum will be distributed through notebooks, CD ROM and on the Internet.
- 3) **Parks & River Access** - Develop multi-purpose river parks along the Arkansas River with a boat launches, picnic areas, trails, and river viewing areas. The parks will be located south of 4th Street and north of Union Avenue along the Arkansas River. The project will also include three (3) new public accesses to the river and trail system from City Park, Penn Street and Spring Street.
- 4) **Environmental Education/Information Center** - Development of the Goodnight Environmental Information Center on the south side of the Arkansas River adjacent to State Highway 96. Center will be part of the Lake Pueblo State park including the Chain of Lakes property and Charles Goodnight Barn acquired in Phase 1 of the project.
- 5) **South Intake Diversion Dam** - Modification of the 3rd and final diversion dam providing a safe passage for kayaks and rafts along the Arkansas River. Develop additional put-ins and take-outs along the river.

- 1) **Arkansas River Fisheries Habitat Restoration** - a 9.5-mile stream enhancement; project in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to improve fishery habitat and the streamside vegetation. The restoration project incorporates access and safety features for boating along the eastern 5-mile stretch of the river;

- 2) **Pueblo Whitewater Park** - In conjunction with the habitat restoration project, 8 drop structures will facilitate fish and boat passage, and provide water features for recreational use by kayakers, canoes, rafts and inner tubes;

- 3) **Chain of Lakes** - Acquisition of the eight reclaimed lakes by Colorado State Parks that are between Pueblo Dam and Pueblo Boulevard on the south side of the Arkansas River. The purchase includes the water rights for a water augmentation plan will need to be acquired to offset the evaporation of water in the ponds;

- 4) **Charles Goodnight Barn** - Acquisition of the historic Charles Goodnight Barn, the only remaining structure from Goodnight's Rock Canyon Ranch established in 1870;



- 5) **Trails** - Enhancements to the Pueblo River Trail System including new trail extensions to the Pueblo West community. Also, the project will upgrade the 25-year old Pueblo River Trail and provide system-wide trail signs;

Description of the Project:

The project is a multi-agency endeavor that will improve wildlife habitat, environmental education, and compatible recreation along the Arkansas River both within the stream and along the river corridor. The project is the vision of the Pueblo Natural Resources & Environmental Education Council (PNREEC). The PNREEC Council, formed in 1995, includes more than 75 organizations and citizens. The project is divided into two phases that has been developed by the PNREEC partners. The two phases identify a series of improvements along the corridor from Lake Pueblo to the confluence with Fountain Creek.

Overall Vision/Context:

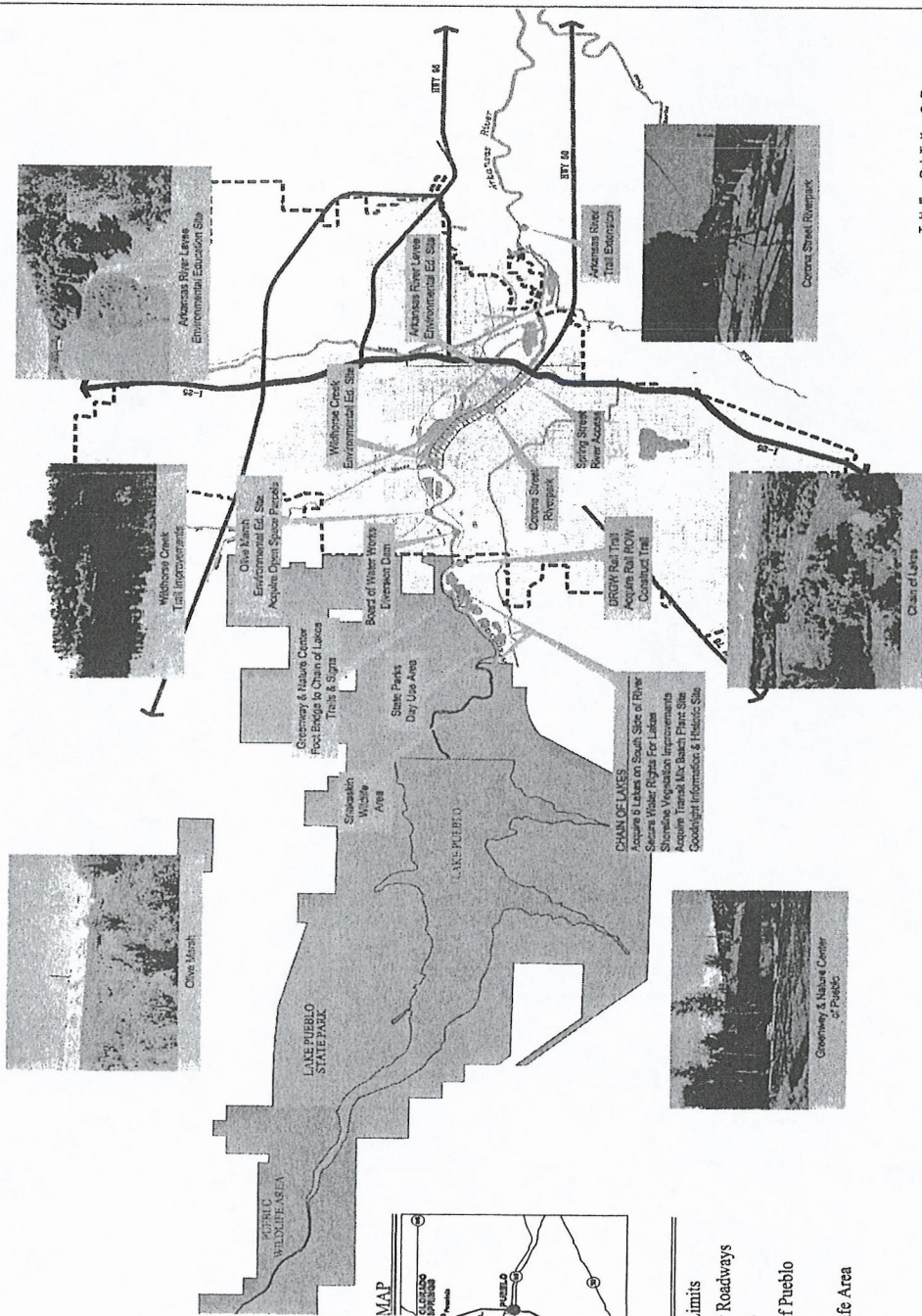
The geography of the Arkansas River is varied enough to provide for a wide variety of activities. The broad expanse of Lake Pueblo, next to its shoreline bluffs and prairie offers habitat for wildlife; the wide open expanses of water and land allow people to experience the outdoors. At the same time, the Arkansas River is the great integrator of the city; a narrow ribbon that serves as a confluence of people and activities.

PHASE 1

The first phase consists of the following six projects: 1) a 9.5-mile stream enhancement project in the Arkansas River; 2) outdoor facility improvements at the Greenway & Nature Center of Pueblo; 3) Trails along the Arkansas River a new trail connection to Pueblo West; 4) Lake Pueblo environmental education improvements; 5) a river otter exhibit at the Pueblo Zoo; and 6) acquisition of the 250-acre Chain of Lakes property and water rights.

PHASE 2

The second phase includes six additional projects that are a combination of new projects and the expansion of projects that are included in the first phase. These projects include: 1) Recreation improvements at Lake Pueblo State Park, the Goodnight Environmental Information and Historic Site and habitat improvements on the Chain of Lakes property; 2) a pedestrian bridge from the Nature Center to the Chain of Lakes; 3) environmental education improvements at five new sites; 4) acquisition of a 1.5-mile rail spur between City Park and the Chain of Lakes, along with expansion of the St. Charles Mesa Trail in Pueblo County; 5) modification of a lowhead dam below City Park; 6) development of riverparks and new access points to the river trail system.



THE CITY OF
PUEBLO

COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE INFORMATION

Species List for the Arkansas River between the Pueblo Dam and the Fountain Creek Confluence:

NATIVE

Green Sunfish
Longnosed Dace
White Sucker
Channel Catfish
Stoneroller
Black Bullhead
Sand Shiner
Red Shiner
Fathead Minnow

NON NATIVE

Brown Trout
Black Crappie
Carp
Largemouth Bass
Longnosed Sucker
Rainbow Trout
Cuttbow
Smallmouth bass
Walleye
Wiper
Saugeye
Yellow Perch
Bluegill

Stocking in 2005 included creel sized rainbow trout that were stocked every month of the year. In addition, fingerling brown trout were stocked in July and fingerling saugeye were stocked in March.

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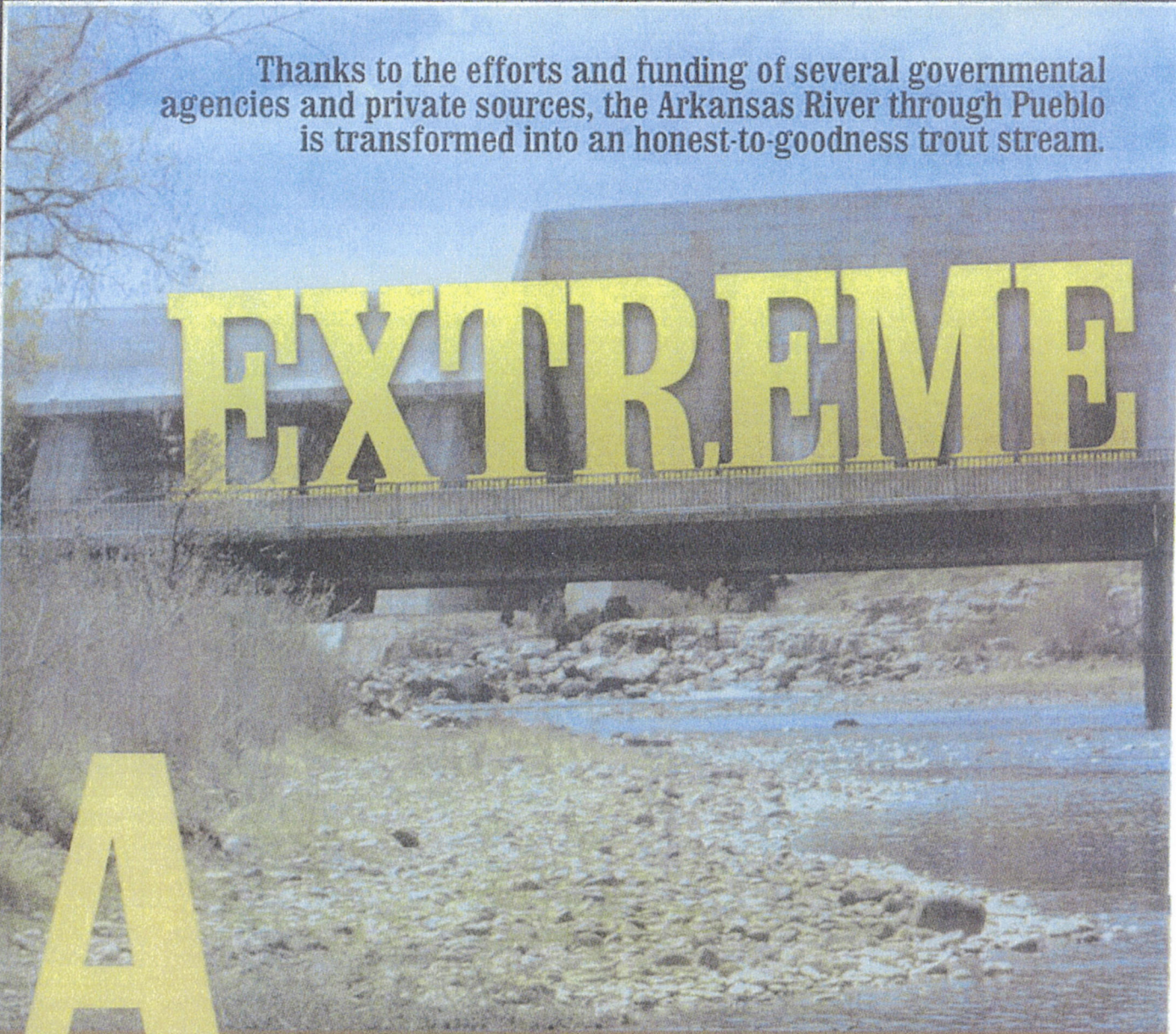
COLORADO OUTDOORS

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2005

\$2.95



EXHIBIT 3



Thanks to the efforts and funding of several governmental agencies and private sources, the Arkansas River through Pueblo is transformed into an honest-to-goodness trout stream.

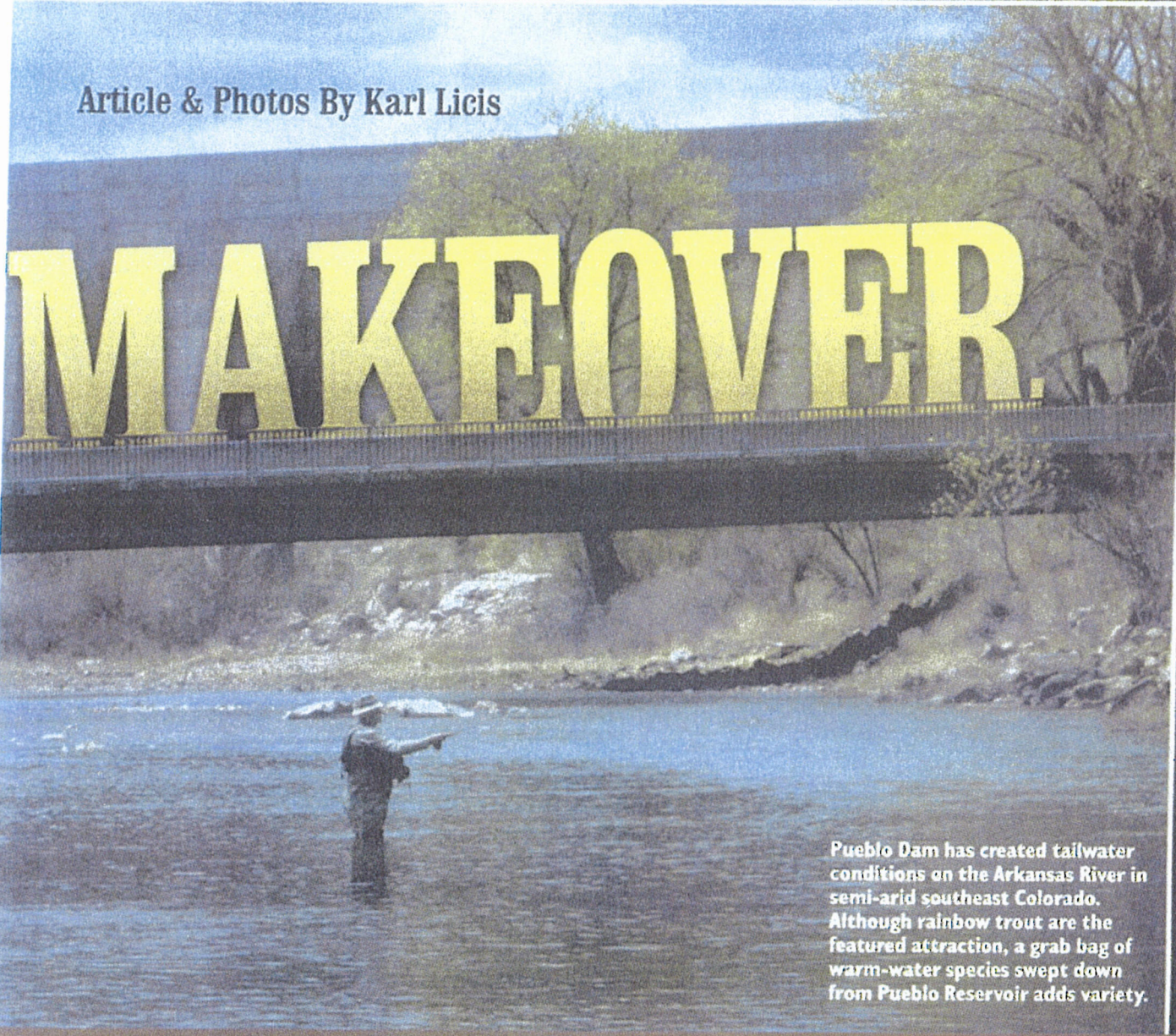
EXTREME

A river runs through Pueblo


— as it has since Colorado's "Steel City" was little more than a frontier trading post along the boundary between the United States and Mexico. • But some 160 years later, the Arkansas River flows through town with an unmistakable new personality. • "Now, when you look down from the 4th Street Bridge, you get a totally different effect than ever before," said Randy Thurston, a member of the Pueblo City Council and former president of that body. "You get the look and the sound of water flowing over the rocks. It's great to see — it really has the look and feel of a river now."

Article & Photos By Karl Licis

MAKEOVER.

A photograph showing a person in waders fishing in the Arkansas River. The person is standing in the water, holding a fishing rod. Above them is a large concrete bridge. The background shows a rocky riverbank with some trees.

Pueblo Dam has created tailwater conditions on the Arkansas River in semi-arid southeast Colorado. Although rainbow trout are the featured attraction, a grab bag of warm-water species swept down from Pueblo Reservoir adds variety.

A photograph of a large mural painted on a concrete wall. The mural depicts a river scene with a boat, a person, and a large fish. The style is somewhat abstract and colorful.

Indeed, it has. What for many years was a river with a flat, uniform, generally ho-hum appearance has been transformed.

Below the bridge, through the middle of town, concrete levees adorned with an

Although fish habitat improvement was a primary objective of the Pueblo Arkansas River Corridor Legacy Project, the effort included construction of a white-water boating park within the city. Rock structures created a series of drop pools that are connected by fish-passage currents.

channel downstream to the Union Avenue Historic District. Between the concrete walls, kayakers and rafters play among the boulders, chutes and backwater eddies of the city's newly dedicated white-water park.

Above the bridge, along a busy railroad yard, past the local high school sports stadium and the Pueblo Greenway and Nature Center, and through a segment of Colorado State Parks property up to Pueblo Dam, a growing number of fishermen are discovering seven miles of a river with a whole new character – and an honest-to-goodness trout stream in the semi-desert of eastern Colorado.

"So far, it's looking great," said David Jones, manager of the ArkAnglers fly-fishing shop in Pueblo. "They've created a whole lot of holding water for trout and slowed down what was an annual blow-out when the dam gates opened up. We should be seeing some carryover of trout now."

That was precisely the plan.

The new-look river is part of the Pueblo Arkansas River Corridor Legacy Project, a venture involving numerous governmental agencies to improve wildlife habitat, environmental education and compatible recreation along the approximately nine miles of river from Pueblo Reservoir downstream to the confluence with Fountain Creek. The project has multiple phases and eventually is to include the Chain of Lakes, a series of reclaimed gravel-mining ponds along the river that will become public fishing waters.

A \$7.5 million fish habitat improvement effort, mostly completed last spring, is the centerpiece of the project's initial phase.

"We had a broad, flat river below the dam," said Al Trujillo, Pueblo Area Wildlife Manager for the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW). "I kept looking at it and thinking this could be a lot better than it is."

Eight years ago, Trujillo toured some stream improvement projects in Summit County. He was impressed by what he saw and began exploring the possibilities of similar work in the Arkansas River below the dam. The city, Pueblo County and some key civic leaders were receptive to the concept. Other governmental agencies joined the effort. All the elements eventually fell into place, and the habitat work began last fall.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers pro-

vided more than \$4.8 million for the undertaking. Great Outdoors Colorado authorized \$1.5 million, with city and county governments and private sources contributing the remainder. The DOW paid \$26,000 directly and provided indirect funding through GOCO's allocation for wildlife benefits. The DOW also helped in the technical planning for the project and fisheries biologist Jim Melby offered almost daily on-site consultation to Sun Construction Co., a Colorado Springs-based contractor from the private sector.

The river below the dam has been subject to dramatic variations in flow, largely to accommodate irrigation interests below. Through the winter storage season, the river traditionally has been low and gently flowing. In the spring and early summer, as the natural runoff hits and irrigation calls come in, it becomes a raging torrent.

Fish that had been stocked at low flows have been swept away by the dramatic increases in volume. On the other hand, at low flows, trout have found relatively little truly good holding water – areas with sufficient depth and currents to sustain significant numbers of fish.

Fish and fishermen, therefore, had been concentrated in a handful of locations. Much of the river remained unattractive and generally fishless.

The habitat project was to address such concerns.

"We were looking at recontouring the channel," said Doug Krieger, senior fisheries biologist for the DOW's Southeast region. "Through the fluctuations in river flow, it had been widened out. In some places it might have been 4 inches deep and 100 yards wide.

"We were looking for ways to narrow the channel in order to provide velocity shelters for fish at high flows and deeper areas for the fish in winter."

Accordingly, through the upper seven miles, channel modifications included the construction of numerous boulder clusters to deflect currents and stabilize banks. A series of J- V- and W-shaped rock weirs further backed up currents, added deeper runs and created off-channel areas for holding fish at higher flows.

Through the kayaking area, strategically placed boulders created a series of drop pools and eddies, connected by currents meant to also serve as fish passages between the pools.

"So far, everyone's been really pleased," said Scott Hobson, senior planner for the

City of Pueblo Planning Department. "The structures have been able to withstand the higher flows we've had this spring, and from all the reports I've been getting, in April and May, when the flows were around 100 to 300 CFS (cubic feet per second) the fishing for trout was excellent."

Hobson noted the project includes 215 manmade structures, and was designed to accommodate flows up to 4,000 CFS. While early summer flows reached about 2,800 CFS, according to Hobson, the project's low-water capabilities also were put to a test.

River flows in early May unexpectedly dropped to a mere 10-15 CFS when downstream interests opted to keep their water in Pueblo Reservoir to facilitate some maintenance work on their diversion structures.

"In the past, that could have caused a real problem," Trujillo said. "It would have sent us into a panic about losing fish. But now, the fish had some pools to hide in. The fish loss was very minimal."

River operators have assured Trujillo similar shutdowns of flow are unlikely in the future. At the least, they would be incremental, with adequate prior notification given to the DOW. Also, domestic-water providers operating in the upper Arkansas Basin have signed a series of intergovernmental agreements related to development of Colorado Springs' proposed Southern Delivery System that require them to maintain adequate minimum flows through Pueblo in all but the most extreme drought years.

"We now have the ability to have trout fishing like we've never had before," Thurston said. "We have the habitat for trout to survive, and we'll have adequate water in the river in the future. It's very gratifying to know it'll be there for our children and our grandchildren."

"It's a phenomenal resource for our community, and as word about the quality of the trout fishing and the boating course gets out, it's sure to attract visitors from other areas."

Already, the fishing below Pueblo Reservoir is a draw for anglers from along the entire Front Range, with winter and spring the most popular seasons.

"The biomass in the river is incredible, and we're holding some pretty good fish now," Jones of ArkAnglers said.

As other tailwater fisheries, the Arkansas produces copious numbers of midges. They are a mainstay of trout diet, and midge-imitating patterns on fine leader tippets are standard equipment for fly-fishermen.

The river also has Blue Wing Olive mayflies, and they may be the river's greatest seasonal attraction. With the Arkansas through Pueblo at a lower elevation than most trout streams, winter and early spring days generally are warmer. Mayfly hatches occur earlier than on other waters and they tend to last longer.

Whether midges or mayflies, fly-fishermen on a given day might enjoy good, shirtsleeve fishing while other streams are in their winter doldrums.

At other times of year, fly patterns that suggest terrestrial insects and streamer flies also can be effective. Wooly bugger streamers that may imitate the river's abundant crawfish can be especially productive.

While fly-fishing interest has been booming, the river has no special restrictions. Spin and bait fishermen are wel-



As the sign suggests, conditions along the river can change rapidly.

come, and the standard four-trout limit is in effect.

Trout are not the sole attraction, however. The river also holds a grab bag of warm-water species that have been swept down from the reservoir. Fishermen may encounter a walleye, smallmouth bass, catfish. . . . Some even fish specifically for the escapees.

With limited, if any, natural reproduction of rainbow trout in the river, fishing success largely depends on periodic stocking by the DOW. Trujillo said the

DOW plans to continue stocking the upper seven miles as needed, and will consider stocking the white-water park segment, which was considered only marginal habitat before the project, but now may be suitable for trout and possibly other gamefish.

"We'll probably stock about the same number as always," Trujillo said. "But we'll probably spread that number over a longer stretch of river. It's something that we're looking at now."

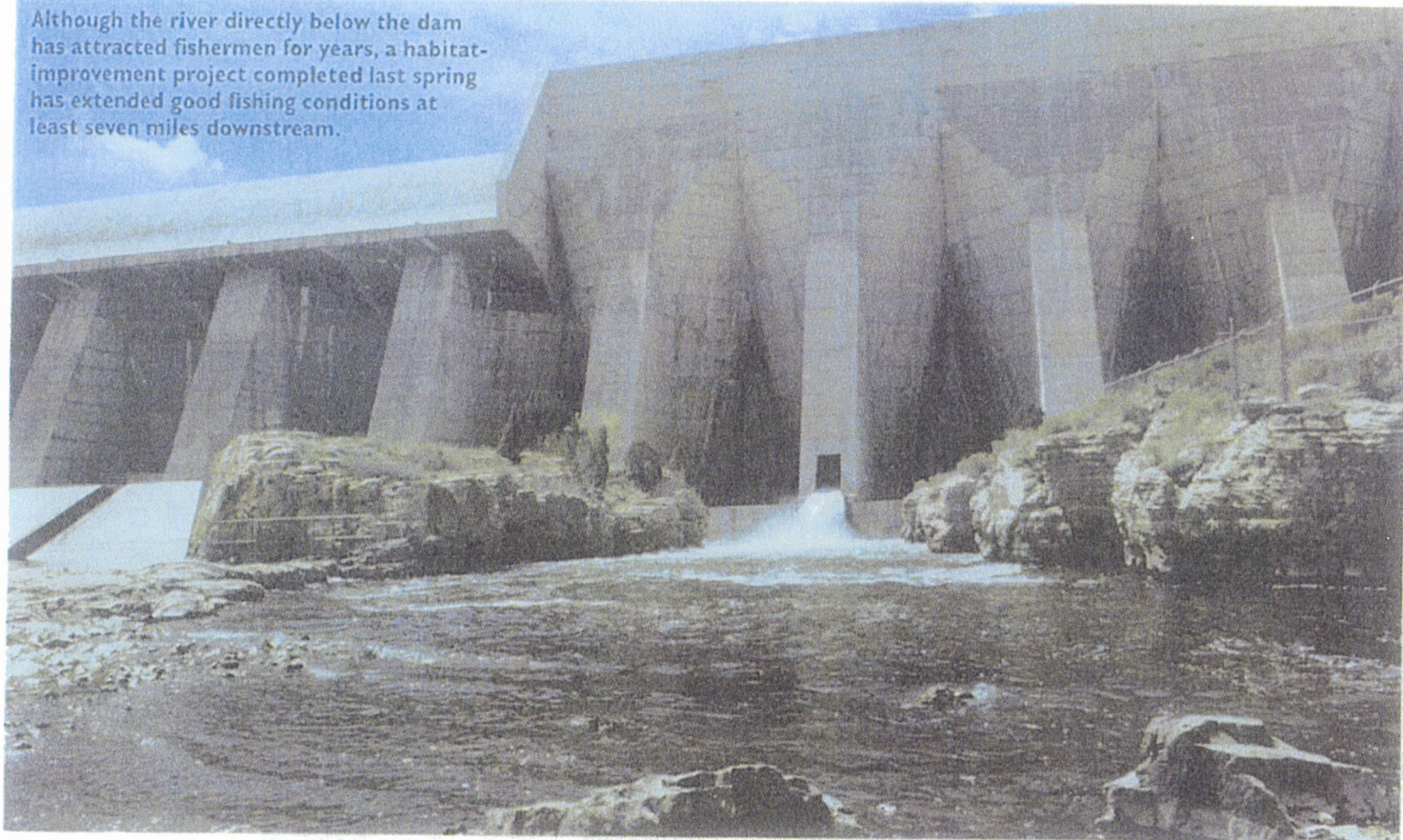
The next step in the habitat project will be removal of invasive tamarisk and Russian olive trees from the river banks and replacing them with native vegetation. Hobson also hopes to develop additional public access points to the river.

That would be just fine with Trujillo.

"We've gone from a dozen good (fishing) holes to a hundred good holes," he said. "That's what we were trying to accomplish all along. That's what this was all about." □

KARL LICIS is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Colorado Springs. This article is copyrighted by the author.

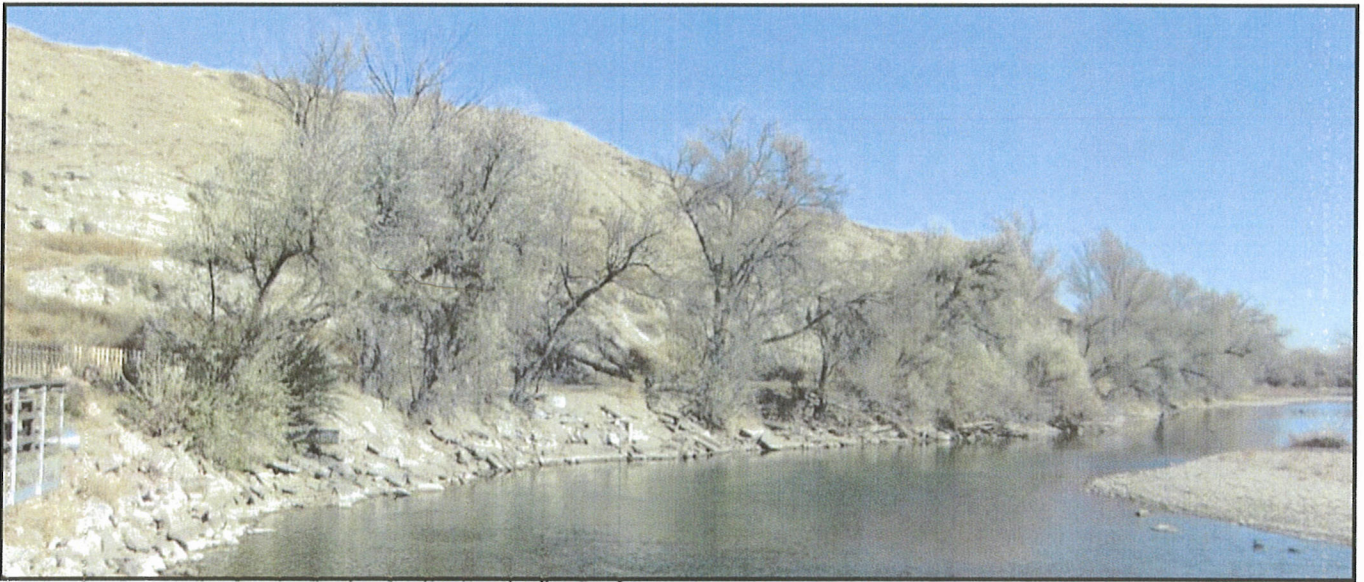
Although the river directly below the dam has attracted fishermen for years, a habitat-improvement project completed last spring has extended good fishing conditions at least seven miles downstream.



Arkansas River Sampling

Methods and preliminary data

November 17-18, 21-22
2011



Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Southeast Aquatic Section
Michelle McGree, Area 11 Aquatic Biologist

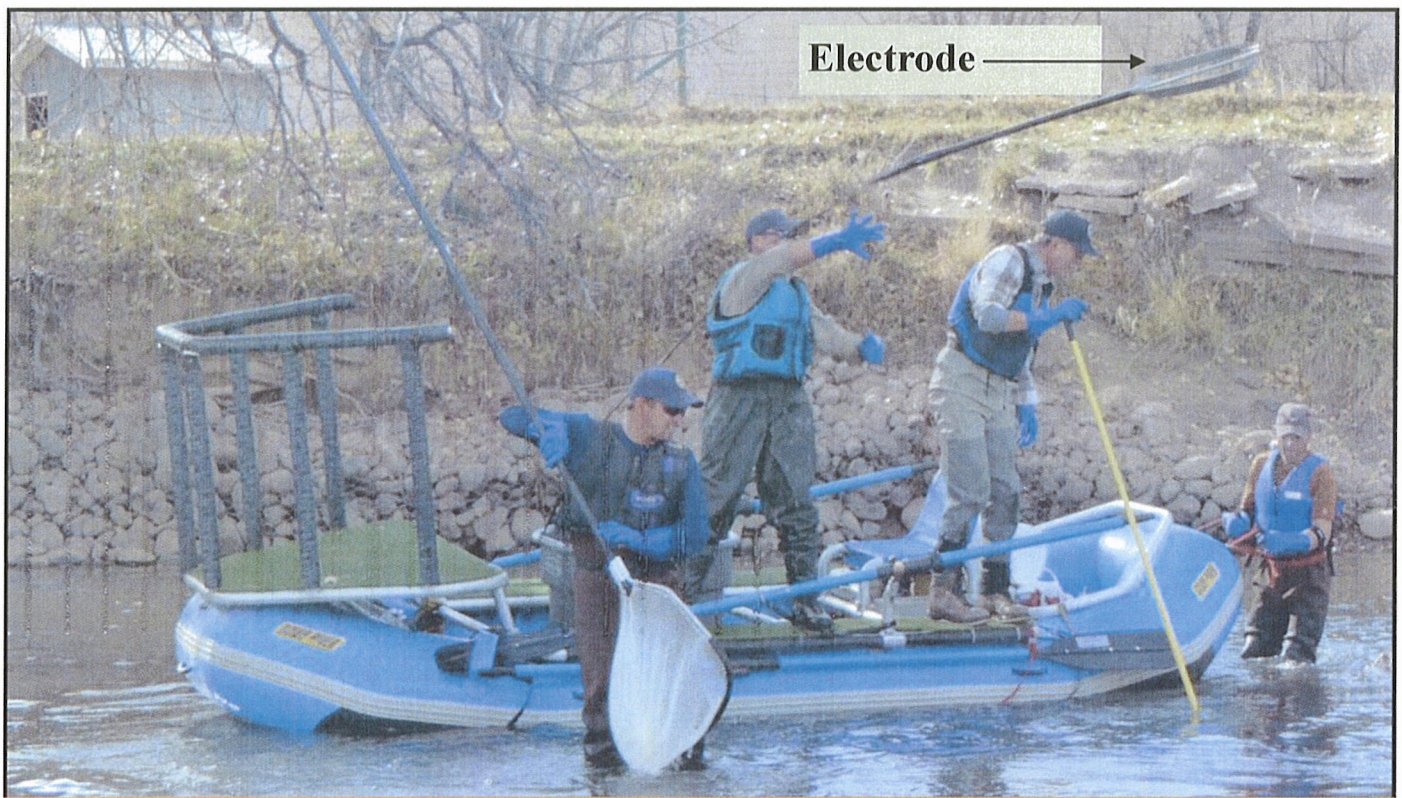


Raft electrofishing



A driver steers the boat, gives direction, and monitors safety. One person throws an electrode (has a positive charge) into the water which completes an electrical circuit and has the effect of forcing fish to swim toward the electrode.

Two people net the fish from the stream and move them onto the boat to await processing on the shore.

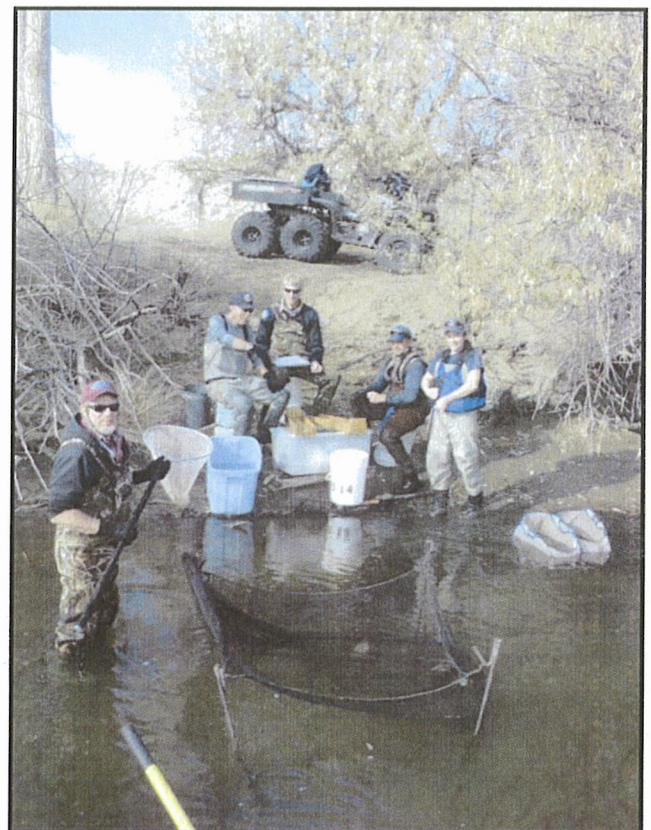
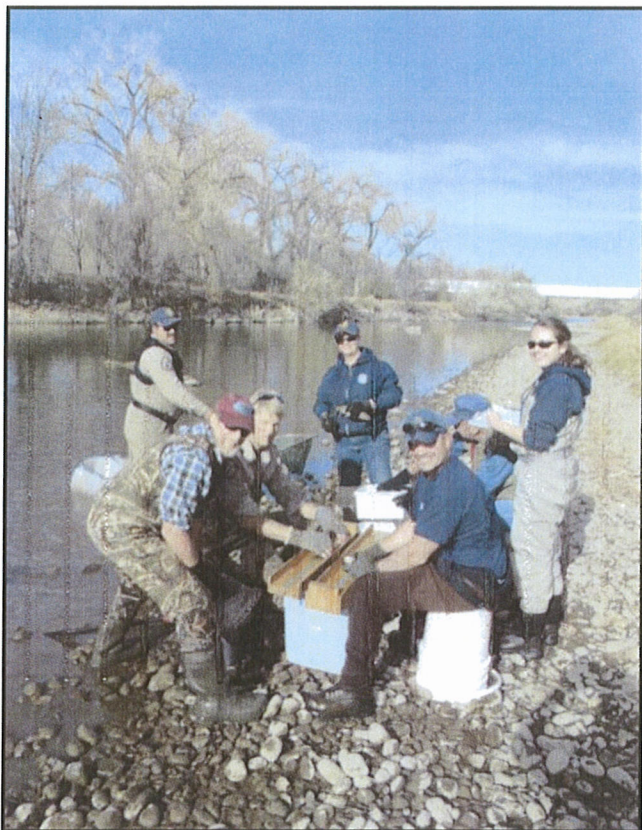


Processing



Along the shore, a processing crew met the raft frequently, transferred fish to a holding pen, and took measurements. This involved marking the brown and rainbow/cuttbow trout with a lower caudal punch (a small hole punch on the lower section of the tail fin that will grow back fairly

quickly). It also involved taking length and weight measurements for each species collected. Once the fish were measured, they were allowed to recover and then were released back into the river.



Stations

Three stations were established, each approximately 0.5 to 0.6 miles in length. One station was above the special regulation section, one was within the special regulation section, and one was below it. Each station was sampled twice: the first run was to mark fish and the second run was to capture marked and unmarked fish. By marking and recapturing fish, population size and fish density can be more accurately assessed. Fish were also measured and weighed to determine size and condition. Rainbow / cuttbow trout was the primary species of interest, followed by brown trout. Bass, suckers, and dace were not marked or assessed for population size or density.

Station 1: Uppermost station. Began downstream of pool (AS1T) and ended near the east side of Valco 2 (AS1B).



Stations

Station 2: Middle station, within special regulation section. Began downstream of Valco Bridge (AS2T) and ended near the east side of Valco 5 (AS2B).

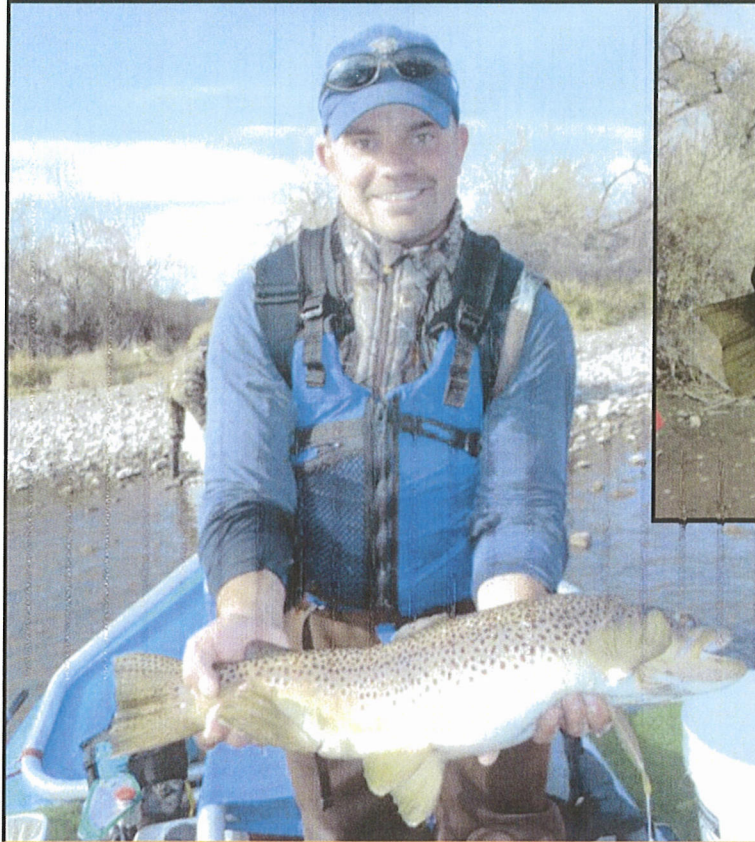
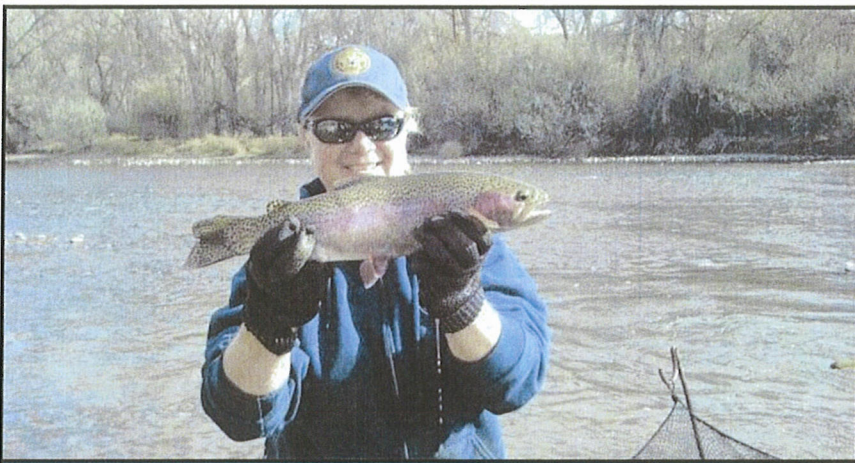


Station 3: Lower station. Began downstream of the railroad crossing (AS3T) and ended upstream of Wildhorse Creek (AS3B).



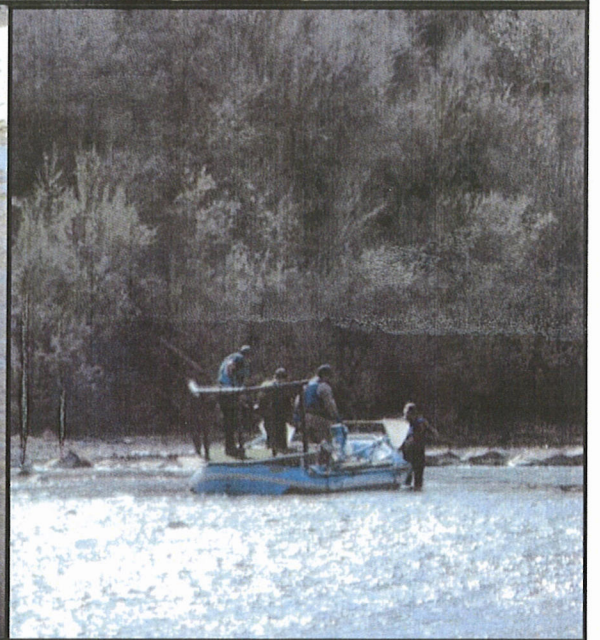
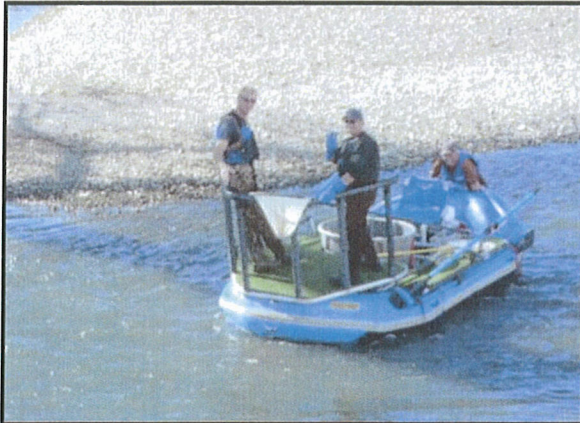
What we saw...

The majority of sport fish caught were rainbow trout and cuttbows, followed by brown trout. At all stations, rainbow / cuttbow trout comprised the majority of the biomass (over 84%). Brown trout were least prevalent at station 1, making up only 5% of the catch. After trout, smallmouth bass were most common and were most numerous in the third station.



What we saw...

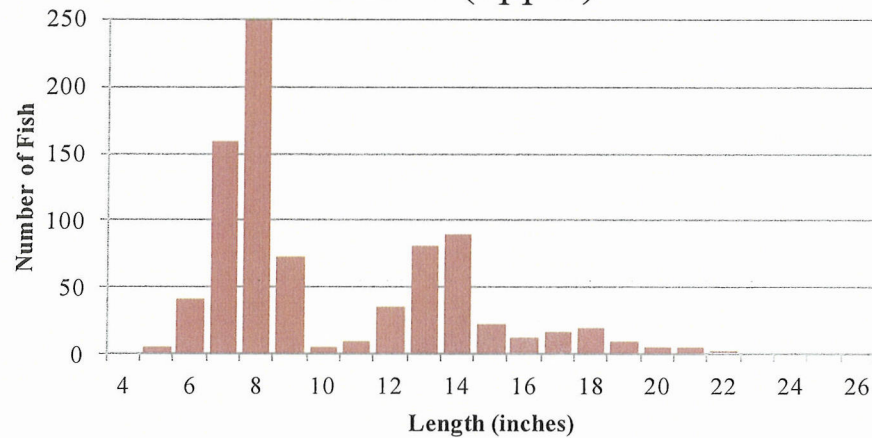
There were particularly good size distributions of both rainbow /cuttbow trout and brown trout. The number and distribution of juvenile rainbow trout observed was un-anticipated, and further assessment of their contribution to the fishery will be the focus of future studies.



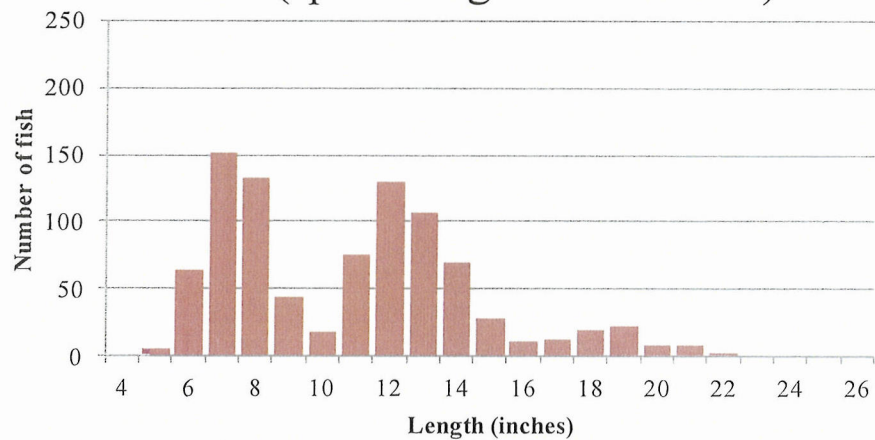
Preliminary data

RAINBOW / CUTTBOW TROUT

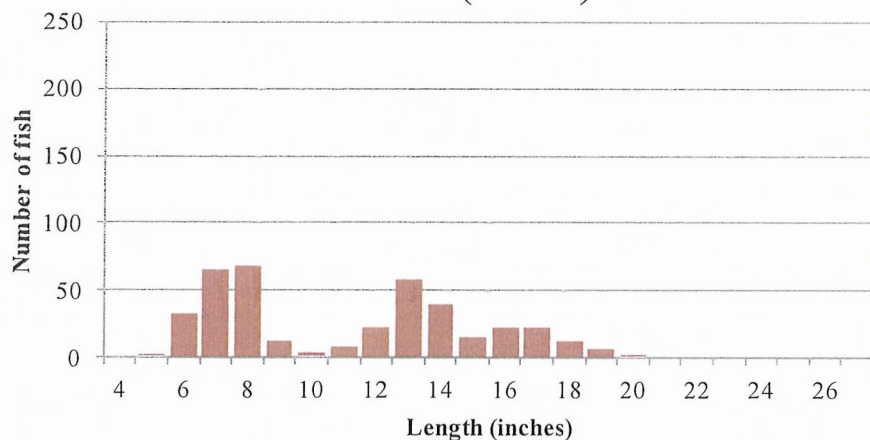
Station 1 (upper)



Station 2 (special regulation section)



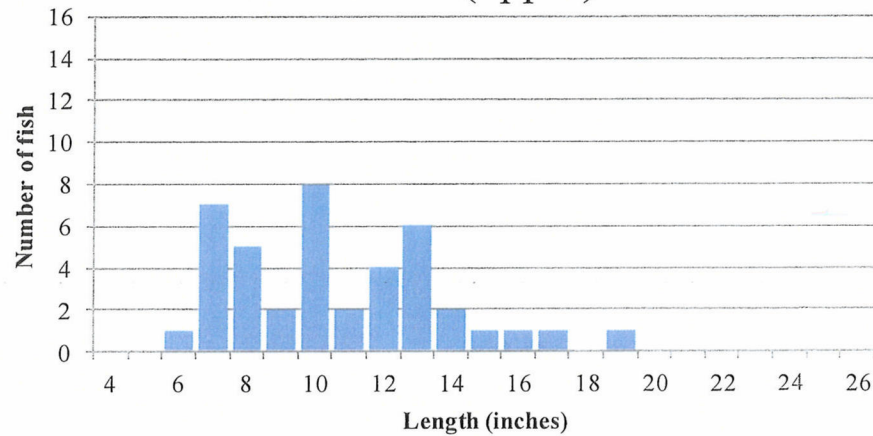
Station 3 (lower)



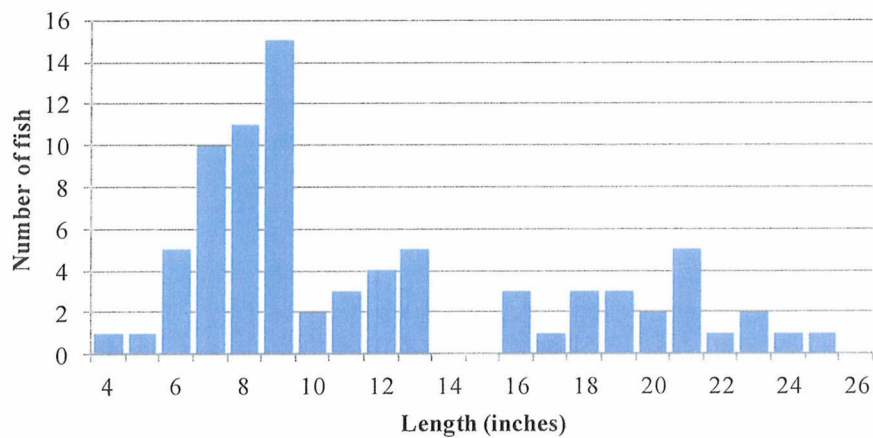
Preliminary data

BROWN TROUT

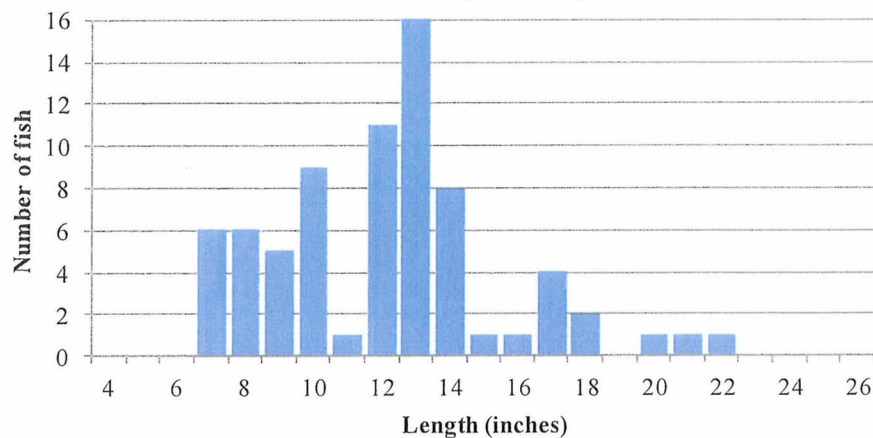
Station 1 (upper)



Station 2 (special regulation section)



Station 3 (lower)



Pueblo lands attention as winter fly-fishing destination

By AMY MATTHEW | amym@chieftain.com | Posted: Tuesday, February 21, 2012 12:00 am

Come on in. The water's fine.

It's great, in fact, if you happen to enjoy fly fishing — especially in Pueblo.

The city has become one of the top fly-fishing spots in the state, thanks in large part to the Arkansas River Legacy Project that was completed in 2005. It's especially true in winter, when our (generally) milder temperatures lure fishermen from colder spots.

"For a long time, this was the best-kept secret in Colorado," said Ben Wurster, co-owner of Steel City Anglers, a fly-fishing outfitter business. "It's not so kept anymore. We've gotten a lot of attention lately. The wintertime fishing here is just phenomenal."

The Legacy Project created 15 W- or V-shaped weirs, or small dams, and 57 clusters of boulders along a 9-mile stretch of the river. All of those create pools in which fish can feed and rest. A better environment means better, and more, fish, and that means good fishing — primarily trout.

"It created a holding area for fish during the winter and in summer (the deeper pools) keep the water oxygenated," said Wurster. "Not only are the fish getting bigger, they're getting healthier across the board."

"In the last two to three years, the size and number of fish have increased dramatically," said Wurster's business partner, Lou McCullough.

It's not attracting only veteran fishermen. Wurster and McCullough said about half of their business comes from people who never have tried fly fishing, or have done it just a few times.

They start out by talking with clients to figure out what they want to get out of the day. Some want to catch a lot of fish; others simply want to learn about the sport and enjoy time on the water.

Next comes the teaching portion: learning how to cast and getting familiar with the fly-fishing lingo.

"We just want to keep them from hooking themselves in the rear or the ear," said Wurster. "That's our only rule: Don't hook me; don't hook me; don't hook me."

Finally, it's time to head to the water to catch — and release — some fish.

McCullough and Wurster said there are at least 25 fishing holes on the Arkansas between the reservoir and Pueblo Boulevard. On the section of river from the Valco bridge to Pueblo

EXHIBIT 5

Boulevard, only artificial flies and lures may be used — no bait — and all trout larger than 15 inches must be released. (The section of river by the Nature and Raptor Center is exempt, as posted.)

McCullough, a native of Wisconsin, started guiding about 15 years ago. He says he and his colleagues "named every rock, every hole" on the river in Eleven Mile State Park and it took just one trip for him to know guiding was for him.

"With my first client, I put him on three trout in three casts and I said, 'That's it,' " said McCullough. "It's not a job."

Wurster was an insurance salesman who worked 80 hours a week until the day he discovered fly fishing about six years ago.

"I picked up a fly rod and went from that (job) to fishing 200 days a year," he said. "It's a short tenure, but I don't know anyone who spends more time on this river than me."

McCullough, Wurster and other local businesses and individuals are involved with the Pueblo chapter of Trout Unlimited, known as Southern Colorado Greenback 509. They're excited about more improvements that are planned for the Arkansas and are helping raise money to go toward that project. It would be funded primarily by a Fishing is Fun grant from Colorado Parks and Wildlife; the city and Trout Unlimited are preparing the grant application now.

Wurster describes local fishermen as "stewards for the river" and hopes that the number of people who discover the sport — and Pueblo's ideal location for it — continues to grow.

"The beauty of it is that we have such a wonderful river, if I never fished anywhere else I'd die happy," he said. "You never stop learning. It's an endless act of discovery."