



PROGRESS REPORT

2012-13 Accomplishments & 2013-14 Prospectus

Let's make the Poudre River the world's best example of a healthy, working river.

That's the vision of a diverse group of regional leaders brought together and facilitated by CSU's Colorado Water Institute to better understand both the operational and ecological needs of the Poudre River. Sharing their knowledge and experience, this work group learned together about many aspects of the Poudre River to identify opportunities for cooperative action.

In many ways, *The Poudre Runs Through It* group reflects the diversity of values held by stakeholders in the Poudre. Some value the river mainly as a working river--for agricultural, municipal and industrial needs. Others value its rich recreational opportunities and ecological attributes. But we all want a river that meets our human needs AND is a healthy river in its own right. In the past, we too often found reasons not to work together. This group is trying instead to find broadly acceptable ways to meet multiple objectives: to have both a working Poudre and a healthier Poudre. We know the Poudre is a managed river and it is not our goal to return the river to its pre-development condition. We have focused on areas for mutual gain while not letting divisive issues inhibit our thinking.

After 8 monthly all-day meetings in 2012 and 2013, the group is ready to report on its progress. At times we talked among ourselves and at times we listened to "success stories" from around the region that provided examples of win-win collaboration. The group dealt with the challenge of grasping an understanding of the multiple perspectives/stakes in the river, the challenges brought about by complex legal and institutional realities, as well as the challenges of plans for new diversions. But the group also identified a variety of innovative opportunities for voluntary, collaborative solutions that may help protect habitat and water quality while respecting private property rights.

The work group is now launching a trio of initiatives it believes embody the dual goals of a working river/healthy river. These initiatives are in the incubation stage. Each of them will take a great deal of work and cooperation.

Flows, Funding, Forum

The initiatives described below fall under the categories of "Flows, Funding, and Forum." *The Poudre Runs Through It* will continue to meet with the assistance of the Colorado Water Institute and local funders through at least the next year to help cultivate these three initiatives and to consider more than 40 other ideas that the group brainstormed. The members of the work group will build on the relationships they have formed—relationships that would have seemed unlikely less than a year ago—as they consider additional ideas that may be ready to launch in the future.

FLOWS: Improving the flows of the river while protecting water rights

What would it take to manage the working river system to keep more of the water in the river at critical times and in critical places to begin to improve the river's ecology? Given the large number of agricultural and municipal interests involved, it may be complicated, it may be expensive, and in fact it may prove impossible. Nonetheless, there appear to be at least two distinct approaches to keep more water in the river; both are being investigated. The key to each is using the river, instead of canals or pipelines, as a conveyance to move water from upstream to a downstream beneficial use, and moving that water in a way that minimizes losses, does not interfere with anyone's water rights, can be administered under Colorado water law, and is market driven. In addition to these two approaches, there may be others that deserve investigation, but these are two that the group is focusing on now. Let's look at each of these in turn (realizing that each approach can benefit the other):

Approach A: Instream flow designation for a section of the Poudre

One way to improve river flows is to officially designate a length of river between specific points as needing a specified minimum flow. Such a minimum flow designation is recognized by Colorado law, established by the Colorado Water Conservation Board in conjunction with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and water dedicated to such a reach is administered within the state's water right priority system. One such stretch—that could improve both the ecology of the river and its recreational and aesthetic values—could be through the City of Fort Collins. Water leased or otherwise acquired upstream of Fort Collins could then be run through the designated instream flow reach, applied to the beneficial use created by an instream flow right in the designated reach, and used in turn by downstream agricultural or other users. This is a long process with no guarantees, and it would ultimately be expensive. However, if done well, it would protect (and perhaps even improve) the river's diversions for agricultural and municipal use while also helping to protect some of the river's environmental values.

Approach B: Regional Conveyance Cooperation

A second option to use the river as a conveyance may involve regional stakeholders with a need to move water from the Poudre River to other areas for municipal or other uses. For example, cities or water districts that currently divert water from the Poudre River upstream from Fort Collins, or plan to do so in the future could, during certain times or under certain conditions, move all or part of that water further downstream of the Poudre through Fort Collins and perhaps Windsor before diverting it to other uses. Using the river as a conveyance could add water, that for years has been diverted from the river, back into at least a portion of the Poudre. (Regional voices involved with the Poudre Runs Through It include Fort Collins, Windsor, Greeley and Thornton.) Doing so would likely be very expensive for the stakeholders and their ratepayers, and would require a very high level of collaboration, cooperation and public support for successful implementation. But the benefits to the river of such stakeholder collaboration could be significant.

Both Approaches A and B have elements in common. Both would require the replacement, retrofitting, enhancement or construction of major infrastructure such as treatment plants, diversion and head gates, as well as adding telemetered flow measurement. All such changes would be expensive, but doable, and might provide additional benefits such as fish and recreational passage. Both too would require new cooperative agreements among water rights holders to maximize the efficiency of the river—for both working AND healthy river goals.

Flow Education

Any approach to improving flows will involve considerable expense and therefore require public support. Public support can only come through education. Therefore the group has identified as a priority broadening public understanding of key water management concepts. For example, since the right to take water from the river is usually measured in cubic feet per second, it will be helpful to understand just how much a "CFS" really is. Yet few beyond the "experts" understand flow measurement, and fewer still pay much attention to how much river flows fluctuate through time, or even from place to place along the river. In order to help all of us better understand river flows, a subgroup of *The Poudre Runs Through It* has imagined a simple but effective project. They will place some attractive flow gages and interpretative signs at strategic places along the river (probably one in Fort Collins and one in Windsor, initially) to help the public visualize flows as measured in cubic feet per second. Sometimes something simple is just what it takes to invoke an "aha" moment.

FUNDING: Translating Vision into Reality

“Putting your money where your mouth is” will be required for us to achieve our goals of making the working river a healthier river. None of the improvements envisioned will be easy or cheap. They will require engineering and legal fees. They likely will require expensive retrofit of infrastructure and measurement and extensive educational campaigns. They may require lease or purchase of water rights. Finding the money for ventures like these is not simply a matter of a few bake sales or even finding a few well-endowed foundations willing to step up to the plate. Funding the transformation of a working river to a working river/healthy river will require major dollars—public dollars. *The Poudre Runs Through It* has undertaken an initiative to investigate how such funding could be generated. They will look at successful models, such as Larimer County’s Open Space Tax or the state of Colorado’s GOCO fund, and others, for inspiration. They believe that those who live in the Poudre River Basin will respond enthusiastically to this vision. Studies show that most everyone loves and benefits from the Poudre. All of us want it to continue providing for our agricultural, urban, and recreational needs. But all of us want the river to be healthy and clean, and that all takes money.

FORUM: Convening for Cooperation

Another initiative will be the establishment of an annual Poudre River Forum to bring together all the communities that benefit from the Poudre to celebrate and cooperate. A one-day gathering will feature presentations and panels, think-tank topics, and fun. The purpose of the forum is to convene the wide diversity of those who care about the river to collaborate on how we can meet the dual goals of working river/healthy river. A subgroup is now planning for the first Forum to take place early in 2014. What’s the scope of this vision? At least 300 people -- maybe as many as 500 -- meeting annually to strategize for a healthier working river.



The Poudre Runs Through It—Some Background

In 2011, UniverCity Connections, the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado, and Colorado State University’s Colorado Water Institute and Center for Public Deliberation joined forces to convene a community series on the Poudre River and the future of Northern Colorado’s water. As many as 350 attended the educational and public deliberation sessions. The result was a resounding agreement that those of us who live along the Poudre and in its valley respect its values of supporting agriculture and urban water use. We love it for its recreational values. But we also want it to be a healthier river. We may disagree on how to get all of that, but we share the common values.

The Colorado Water Institute at CSU, with partial funding from the Bohemian Foundation's Pharos Fund , decided to build on the momentum. The result is the convening in October 2012 of a group of 30 leaders from the Poudre’s various communities in an eight month process of study and action leading to the initiatives outlined above. Participants were chosen for their expertise related to the Poudre River, including those from the agricultural, environmental, municipal, industrial, recreational, business, development, and other sectors. Another factor in the selection of participants was the intent to include individuals associated with the wide diversity of organizations with interests in the Poudre River. These leaders devoted a full day each month to learning from one another and from outside resources in order to build the relationships and the knowledge to come together on these initiatives. They learned about a number of individuals and groups already working on projects aimed at making the best use of the Poudre River and improving its health—ranging from downtown development to restoration projects. Members of the work group and the organizations with which they are affiliated are shown on the following page.

Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group Participants

Last Name	First	Profession/Workplace	Residence
Bartholow	John	Ecologist, Retired USGS	Fort Collins
Bledsoe	Brian	Hydrologist, Colorado State University	Fort Collins
Boring	Jeffrey	Resource Specialist, Larimer County Natural Resources Department	Fort Collins
Brown	Dan	Attorney, Fischer, Brown, Bartlett & Gunn, P.C. for Cache La Poudre Water Users Assoc.	Fort Collins
Bustos Jr.	John	Retired, US Forest Service	Fort Collins
Caraway	Ray	Executive Director, Community Foundation of Northern Colorado	Fort Collins
Cronin	Sean	Executive Director, St. Vrain & Left Hand Water Conservancy District	Loveland
Koleber	Mark	Water Supply Director, City of Thornton	Thornton
Malers	Steve	Systems Engineer, Riverside Technology	Fort Collins
Modesitt	Brad	Owner, Mountain Whitewater Descents	Fort Collins
Odell	Wynne	Partner, Odell Brewing Company	Fort Collins
Reidhead	Jim	Retired	Fort Collins
Reckentine	Eric	Deputy Director of Water Resources, City of Greeley Water and Sewer	Greeley
Robenalt	Matt	Urban Redevelopment & Public Finance, Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority	Fort Collins
Sanderson	John	Director of Conservation Science, The Nature Conservancy	Fort Collins
Sears	Bill	President, American International Investment & Trading Co.	Laporte
Seaworth	Troy	Farmer, Seaworth Ag Enterprises	Wellington
Shannon	Rich	Vice President, Pinnacle Consulting Group - Real Estate Development	Fort Collins
Smith	Steve	Manager, North Poudre Irrigation Co.	Wellington
Smolnik	Susan	Water Resources Engineer, City of Fort Collins Utilities	Fort Collins
Stokes	John	Natural Areas Department and Poudre River Sustainability Director, City of Fort Collins	Fort Collins
Trowbridge	Dale	General Manager, New Cache La Poudre Irrigating Co. & Cache La Poudre Reservoir Co.	Eaton
Varra	George	Retired Poudre River Commissioner, State Engineer's Office; Farmer, George Varra Farms	Fort Collins
Willis	Wade	Parks & Open Space Manager, Town of Windsor	Fort Collins
Wind	Brad	Deputy Manager, Northern Water	Berthoud

Steering Committee

Bartholow	John	Ecologist, Retired USGS	Fort Collins
Brown	Dan	Attorney, Fischer, Brown, Bartlett & Gunn, P.C. for Cache La Poudre Water Users	Fort Collins
Stokes	John	Natural Areas Department & Poudre River Sustainability Director, City of Fort Collins	Fort Collins
Trowbridge	Dale	General Manager, New Cache La Poudre Irrigation Co. & Cache La Poudre Reservoir Co.	Eaton
Robotham	Doug	Colorado Water Project Director, The Nature Conservancy	Denver

Conveners/Facilitators

Waskom	Reagan	Director, Colorado Water Institute, Colorado State University	Fort Collins
Smith	MaryLou	Policy & Collaboration Specialist, Colorado Water Institute, Colorado State University	Windsor
Plombon	Beth	Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, Colorado State University	Fort Collins

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Organizations with which Poudre Runs Through it Work Group Members are Affiliated

American Water Resources Association (AWRA) – Colorado Section	Fort Collins Housing Authority
Big Thompson Watershed Forum	Fort Collins Natural Resources Advisory Board
Cache La Poudre Reservoir Co.	Fort Collins Water Board
Cache La Poudre Water Users Association	Larimer County Farm Services Administration
City of Fort Collins Natural Resources	Lower Poudre Augmentation Co.
City of Fort Collins Utilities	New Cache La Poudre Irrigating Co.
Colorado Ag Water Alliance	North Poudre Irrigation Co.
Colorado Conservation Exchange	Northern Water
Colorado Dry Bean Association	Participant in Halligan/Seaman Water Management Project
Colorado Foundation for Water Education	Poudre Heritage Alliance
Colorado Water Congress	Poudre River Trust
Colorado Water Innovation Cluster	Rocky Mountain Flycasters
Community Foundation of Northern Colorado	Save the Poudre
Embrace Northern Colorado	South Platte Basin Roundtable
Fort Collins Conservation District	The Nature Conservancy
Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority (DDA)	UniverCity Connections – Poudre Group
Fort Collins Downtown Merchants Association	Weld County Underground Water Users Association
Metro Roundtable	Water Supply & Storage Company