



**COLORADO**  
**Colorado Water  
Conservation Board**  
Department of Natural Resources

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**TO:** Colorado Water Conservation Board Members

**FROM:** Jojo La, Endangered Species Policy Specialist  
Interstate, Federal, and Water Information Section

**DATE:** September 18-19, 2019 Board Meeting

**AGENDA ITEM:** 6. Yampa River Fund

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## Background

The Yampa River Fund is a collaborative community-based organization dedicated to identifying and funding activities that protect the water supply, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities provided by the Yampa River. The fund focuses on investing in conservation and restoration activities that positively impact Yampa River flows to support the stakeholders in the basin. The goal of the fund is to promote a healthy, flowing river to ensure that the Yampa River remains the thriving center of its communities for future generations. The fund has adopted the goals set forth in the Yampa-White-Green Roundtable Basin Implementation Plan and Yampa Basin Integrated Water Management Plan to ensure existing consumptive, environmental, and recreational uses are met. In addition, the fund can also advance the goals identified in the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program Yampa Management Plan.

The primary purpose of the Yampa River Fund is to provide funding and support the efforts of other organizations and individuals to implement (i) voluntary, market-based water leases and releases from reservoirs that will enhance river flows; (ii) restoration actions (on private and public land) that will improve riparian, in-channel streambank and aquatic habitat; and (iii) improvements or enhancements to water storage, distribution, management and infrastructure in the Yampa River Basin that will generate combined agricultural, industrial, environmental, and recreational benefits.

## Stakeholders

The Yampa River Fund is a collaboration of over 20 community partners, including the Yampa-White-Green Basin Roundtable, the Cities of Steamboat Springs and Craig, Routt and Moffat counties, local non-governmental organizations, the community Agriculture Alliance, outdoor recreation businesses, and other local stakeholders. The fund will be executed through a non-binding Collaboration and Administration Agreement which establishes a governing board, a selection committee, and a management and fiscal agent.



The Collaboration and Administration Agreement also establishes a “Non-Voting Advisory Technical Committee”. The Colorado Water Conservation Board is a participant on this technical committee to advise the selection committee and board of directors. Other participants on the Non-Voting Advisory Technical Committee include Colorado Parks and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Trout Unlimited, Dinosaur National Monument (U.S. National Park Service), Upper Yampa Working Group, and other members deemed necessary or appropriate.

## Funding

The Yampa River Fund establishes a sustainable source of funding to be used for grants that will support projects and programs that will enhance water security for communities, agriculture, the economy and the natural environment in the Yampa Valley. To start the fund, The Nature Conservancy has raised \$1.75 million to contribute towards the Yampa River Fund endowment and a \$1 million challenge grant that will match donations dollar for dollar. Other stakeholders have also reported funding commitments for the endowment. Private donations can also be contributed to the fund.

The Colorado Water Conservation Board has not contributed or committed any funds to the endowment. However, staff has supported and has provided technical advice during the development of the fund.

## Project Eligibility

To be eligible for funding during “Phase I”, projects must support the fund’s goals, must be consistent with the fund’s intent to support only projects that are based on approved science, and must fall into an approved project category. The project categories include: (i) flow enhancement reservoir releases, (ii) identified restoration actions, and (iii) infrastructure improvements. Priority will be placed on projects that benefit stream reaches with known valuable aquatic resources, including the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program critical habitat, and/or riparian resources, recreational activities or that have known water quality standard exceedances. Additional phases and different categories may be established at a later date by the Yampa River Fund Board of Directors.

The Yampa River Fund will be launched on September 19, 2019 with an anticipated date of early 2020 to start awarding project funds.

## Staff Recommendation

This item is informational only. No Board action is requested.

