United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In Reply Refer To:
CO-932 (7250)

Mr. Rob Viehl
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203

Dear Mr. Viehl:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is writing this letter to formally communicate its recommendation for an instream flow water right on Coon Creek, located in Water Division 5.

Location and Land Status. Coon Creek originates on the north side of Grand Mesa, approximately eight miles south of Molina. The reach that is the subject of this recommendation begins at the confluence of Coon Creek with West Fork Coon Creek and extends to a point 100 feet upstream from the headgate of the Southside Canal, a distance of approximately 3.1 miles. The BLM manages approximately 0.25 miles of this reach, while 0.65 miles are managed by the U.S. Forest Service and 2.2 miles are on private lands.

Biological Summary. Coon Creek is a cold-water, high gradient stream. The stream is confined by bedrock in most locations. The stream generally has medium-sized substrate, ranging from gravels to small boulders. The stream has abundance of pools and runs but riffle habitat is limited. The existing pools are sufficient for overwintering fish.

Fisheries surveys have revealed a self-sustaining population of cutthroat trout and brook trout. Intensive macro-invertebrate surveys have not been conducted, but spot samples have revealed abundant stonefly.

The riparian community is comprised of aspen, alder, and various willow species. The riparian community is in very good condition and provides abundant shading and cover for fish habitat.

R2Cross Analysis. The BLM collected the following R2Cross data from Coon Creek:

Cross Section Date	Discharge Rate	Top Width	Winter Flow Recommendation (meets 2 of 3 hydraulic criteria)	Summer Flow Recommendation (meets 3 of 3 hydraulic criteria)
06/09/2021 #1	1.25 cfs	12.38 feet	0.51 cfs	4.82 cfs

06/09/2021 #2	1.01 cfs	8.65 feet	0.99 cfs	2.34 cfs
07/19/2023 #1	4.39 cfs	6.95 feet	0.41 cfs	2.75 cfs
		Averages:	0.64 cfs	3.30 cfs

BLM's analysis of this data indicates that the following flows are needed to protect the fishery and natural environment to a reasonable degree.

> 3.30 cfs is recommended during the snowmelt runoff period from April 16 through June 30. This flow rate makes a very high percentage of the stream channel available to the fish population so that fishes can seek shelter and rest from the high velocity flows that occur during this period.
>
> 1.10 cubic feet per second is recommended during the warm weather portion of the year, from July 1 to September 30. This recommendation is driven by the average depth criteria. Coon Creek is very steep and has limited usable habitat, so it is important to protect a flow rate that makes a high percentage of this habitat available to the fish population while they are completing critical life history functions during the warm weather months.
>
> 0.64 cubic feet per second is recommended during the cold weather period from October 1 to April 15. This recommendation is driven by the average velocity criteria. This flow rate should prevent pools from freezing, allowing the fish population to successfully overwinter.

Water Availability. The BLM recommends relying upon three sources of data for water availability analysis. CSUFlows should be consulted to derive an estimate of natural water availability based upon watershed characteristics. In addition, the U.S. Geological Survey operated a gage on Coon Creek from 1937 to 1943. The only flow data collected were monthly volumetric totals, but this data can provide a general estimate of water availability if the monthly volumes are divided into average daily flow rates. Also, diversion records for the Southside Canal should be consulted to confirm flows that are available during the irrigation season.

BLM completed a hydrologic reconnaissance on Coon Creek during 2023. BLM learned, based on spot measurements, that approximately 79% of the flow in main stem Coon Creek is provided by West Fork Coon Creek. The flow in West Fork Coon Creek appears to be primarily groundwater discharged from porous basalt geology of Grand Mesa. Accordingly, West Fork Coon Creek appears to provide a very stable source of base flows for main stem Coon Creek.

The BLM is aware of the following water rights within the proposed instream flow reach:

McGeogh Ditch – 3.52 cfs, absolute
Saddle Ditch – 4.34 cfs, absolute
Schlenzing Pump and Pond – 0.1 cfs, absolute
Satterfield Spring 1 – 0.4 cfs, absolute

The BLM is aware of the following surface water rights within the Coon Creek watershed that are upstream from the proposed instream flow reach:

Jewell Hydropower Diversion – 0.4 cfs, absolute
Satterfield Spring 2 – 0.033 cfs, absolute
Rasmussen Hydropower Diversion – 0.27 cfs

The BLM also aware of storage water rights located upstream as follows:

Coon Reservoir No. 1 – 484 acre-feet (includes 0.62 acre feet transferred from Coon Reservoir No. 4).
Coon Reservoir No. 2 – 195.0 acre-feet
Coon Reservoir No. 3 – 201. acre-feet
Long Slough Reservoir (also known as Stubbs, McKinney and Clark Reservoir) – 206.5 acre-feet

Relationship to Land Management Plans. BLM's land use plan calls for Coon Creek to be managed to maintain, restore, or improve riparian conditions, such that proper functioning conditions are achieved. It also specifies that instream flow appropriations will be pursued on fishery streams to ensure sufficient flows rates for fisheries protection. Appropriation of an instream flow water right would assist BLM in long-term management of riparian and fishery values.

Data sheets, R2Cross output, fishery survey information, and photographs of the cross section were included with BLM's draft recommendation in February 2022. We thank both Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Colorado Water Conservation Board for their cooperation in this effort.

If you have any questions regarding our instream flow recommendation, please contact Roy Smith at 303-239-3940.

Sincerely,

ALAN BITTNER

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Alan Bittner
Deputy State Director
Resources and Fire

Cc:
Stacey Colon, Grand Junction Field Office
Melanie Letalik, Grand Junction Field Office
Greg Larson, Upper Colorado River District Office