



Colorado Water Conservation Board

Water Plan

Water Project Summary

Name of Applicant	Larimer County	
Name of Water Project	River Bluffs Open Space Habitat Restoration	
Grant Request Amount		\$213,000.00
Primary Category		\$213,000.00
<i>Watershed Health & Recreation</i>		
Total Applicant Match		\$79,732.00
<i>Applicant Cash Match</i>		\$70,206.00
<i>Applicant In-Kind Match</i>		\$9,526.00
Total Other Sources of Funding		\$1,000.00
<i>Friends of Larimer County Parks & Open Lands</i>		\$1,000.00
Total Project Cost		\$293,732.00

Applicant & Grantee Information

Name of Grantee: Larimer County
Mailing Address: 200 Oak Street, Suite 3100 Fort Collins CO 80521

Organization Contact: Jenn Almstead
Position/Title: Fund Development & Projects Specialist Email: jalmstead@larimer.org
Phone:

Grant Management Contact: Jenn Almstead
Position/Title: Fund Development & Projects Specialist Email: jalmstead@larimer.org
Phone:

Grant Management Contact - Alternate: Zac Wiebe
Position/Title: Planning & Natural Resource Specialist Email: zwiebe@larimer.org
Phone:

Description of Grantee/Applicant

Larimer County is not a utility or water provider, but we manage land use and coordinate with multiple districts and cities that do provide utilities.

Type of Eligible Entity

- ☒ Public (Government)
- ☐ Public (District)
- ☐ Public (Municipality)
- ☐ Ditch Company
- ☐ Private Incorporated
- ☐

- ☒ Private Individual, Partnership, or Sole Proprietor
- ☐ Non-governmental Organization
- ☐ Covered Entity
- ☐ Other

Category of Water Project

- ☐ Agricultural Projects
Developing communications materials that specifically work with and educate the agricultural community on headwater restoration, identifying the state of the science of this type of work to assist agricultural users among others.
- ☐ Conservation & Land Use Planning
Activities and projects that implement long-term strategies for conservation, land use, and drought planning.
- ☐ Engagement & Innovation Activities
Activities and projects that support water education, outreach, and innovation efforts. Please fill out the Supplemental Application on the website.
- ☒ Watershed Restoration & Recreation
Projects that promote watershed health, environmental health, and recreation.
- ☐ Water Storage & Supply
Projects that facilitate the development of additional storage, artificial aquifer recharge, and dredging existing reservoirs to restore the reservoirs' full decreed capacity and Multi-beneficial projects and those projects identified in basin implementation plans to address the water supply and demand gap.

Location of Water Project

Latitude	40.485370
Longitude	-104.961247
Lat Long Flag	Precise coordinates: Project coordinates are readily definable and precisely define the location of the project
Water Source	Fossil Creek
Basins	South Platte
Counties	Larimer
Districts	3-Cache La Poudre River

Water Project Overview

Major Water Use Type	Agricultural
Type of Water Project	Design / Engineering
Scheduled Start Date - Design	12/1/2025
Scheduled Start Date - Construction	

Description

Larimer County's Department of Natural Resources (LCDNR) is proposing an important design project to realign Fossil Creek, a tributary to the Poudre River, to its historic channel at River Bluffs Open Space near Windsor, Colorado. Fossil Creek flows into the Poudre River from the west and has been re-aligned and channelized to expand an irrigated hay field, which altered its natural flow and compromised the ecological integrity of the riparian areas at the open space. In 2024, LCDNR hired an environmental engineering firm to develop a conceptual restoration design for Fossil Creek and its surrounding area at River Bluffs Open Space.

The River Bluffs Open Space Habitat Restoration Project represents the highest priority phase of this plan by transforming an existing alfalfa field into a healthy, functioning riparian corridor. This will be achieved by

realigning Fossil Creek to its historic channel and redirecting the water currently used for agricultural purposes to this project. The new alignment will be complemented by additional wetlands, simulated beaver dam structures, and related habitats, as well as increased water flow capacity to the Poudre River. The requested funding will allow LCDNR to make this project construction ready by hiring a lead consultant to conduct site assessments, obtain the necessary environmental permits, and prepare the final construction documents.

Measurable Results

- New Storage Created (acre-feet)
- New Annual Water Supplies Developed or Conserved (acre-feet), Consumptive or Nonconsumptive
- Existing Storage Preserved or Enhanced (acre-feet)
- New Storage Created (acre-feet)
- Length of Stream Restored or Protected (linear feet)
- Length of Pipe, Canal Built or Improved (linear feet)
- Efficiency Savings (dollars/year)
- Efficiency Savings (acre-feet/year)
- 8 Area of Restored or Preserved Habitat (acres)
- Quantity of Water Shared through Alternative Transfer Mechanisms or water sharing agreement (acre-feet)
- Number of Coloradans Impacted by Incorporating Water-Saving Actions into Land Use Planning
- Number of Coloradans Impacted by Engagement Activity
- Other
- ~0.4 miles (200 feet) of new riparian corridor and associated habitat.

Water Project Justification

Larimer County Department of Natural Resources (LCDNR) is seeking \$213,000 in grant funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) through the Water Plan Grant to support the realignment of Fossil Creek, a tributary to the Cache la Poudre River, to its historic channel. This initiative aims to create a new healthy, riparian corridor at River Bluffs Open Space (RBOS) located near Windsor, Colorado.

LCDNR purchased River Bluffs Open Space in 2004 as part of a greater vision for the Poudre River corridor, as identified in the Larimer County Open Lands Master Plan to protect ecological, visual, open space, and agricultural values. Per the River Bluffs Open Space Management Plan, the primary management goals are to protect the riparian areas and upland habitats on the open space, provide a buffer to other conserved lands along a continuous corridor, and complete the Poudre River Trail connecting communities from Greeley to Fort Collins.

In 2017, the Lower Poudre River Master Plan, led by the Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed (CPRW), identified the segment of the Poudre River through River Bluffs Open Space as the highest priority reach. This segment of the river was identified as having significant restoration potential due to geomorphic challenges, floodplain disconnection, and excessive bank erosion, with an opportunity to improve the river’s resilience and ecological health.

From 2018-2023, LCDNR oversaw the design, implementation, and monitoring of a large-scale restoration project along the Poudre River at River Bluffs Open Space. The project has been highly successful in using natural river processes and natural materials to establish microhabitats for improved biodiversity, while accommodating natural flow regimes for long-term performance and flood resilience.

In 2024, LCDNR and its consultants developed a conceptual restoration design for the uplands and Fossil Creek corridor at River Bluffs Open Space. The plan considers the numerous planning efforts in the Poudre River

watershed with options to improve the ecological health and vitality of open space. The proposed project for this grant opportunity represents the initial phase of the plan to produce final designs to restore Fossil Creek and its surroundings into a healthy and vibrant riparian corridor.

The River Bluffs Open Space Habitat Restoration Project closely aligns with the goals of the Colorado Water Plan (CWP), which include Vibrant Communities and Thriving Watersheds. Specifically, this project meets the key objectives of three Partner Actions under Vibrant Communities, as described below.

1. **Healthy Lands:** The restoration project will take place at River Bluffs Open Space, which is permanently protected and owned by LCDNR, with a conservation easement held by the City of Greeley and Great Outdoors Colorado. The open space is actively stewarded for ecosystem benefits and biodiversity and includes a half-mile reach of the Poudre River, approximately a quarter-mile reach of Fossil Creek, and associated riparian corridors (CWP, Chapter 6, p. 180).
2. **Community Investments:** This project will restore stream habitat and promote watershed protection, both of which are vital to enhancing the quality of life in urban areas (Colorado Water Plan, Chapter 6, p. 180). For many years, LCDNR has engaged in multiple planning processes to involve local residents and public officials in discussions regarding the health and future sustainability of the Poudre River. These plans include Larimer County's Water Master Plan, Larimer County Open Lands Master Plan, River Bluffs Open Space Management Plan, and CPRW's Lower Poudre River Master Plan (CWP, Chapter 6, p. 181).
3. **Meeting Future Water Needs:** This project is a flow enhancement project to reestablish the connection between Fossil Creek and its floodplain, thereby benefiting both stream and riparian habitats while improving water quality (CWP, Chapter 6, p. 205).

Additionally, this project aligns with three goals identified in the South Plate Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) including an emphasis on restoration projects that include reconnection of historic channels and riparian corridor restoration as a key strategy to restore ecosystem function (BIP, pg. 19); as well as prioritizing projects that reduce erosion and improve sediment transport to maintain channel stability and habitat quality (BIP, pg. 34, Section 6.A.6.); and explicit prioritization for projects that improve instream habitat connectivity and fish passage (BIP, pg. 37, Section 7.C).

Related Studies

The plans listed below engaged local government agencies, non-profits, landowners, community groups, and the public through steering committee meetings, public outreach events, one-on-one interviews, and online surveys. Their input provided crucial local insights that helped guide restoration priorities and funding strategies. Overall, these collaborative processes ensured that each plan's recommendations aligned with community needs and local conditions.

2017 Lower Poudre River Master Plan (Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed): This plan was developed in response to the 2013 flooding event and focuses on improving the river's ecological health and resilience. The plan identifies the half-mile reach of the Poudre River located at River Bluffs Open Space as the "highest priority section of the river for restoration projects."

2024 Larimer County Water Master Plan: The plan outlines long-term strategies to ensure a sustainable water future for the county and underscores the importance of local and regional water systems, including the Poudre River as a vital resource for both ecosystems and communities. These broad strategies include regional water resilience, ecosystem health, and inter-agency collaboration.

2015 Larimer County Open Lands Master Plan: This plan identifies the Poudre River as a conservation priority and important natural resource that offers valuable ecological, recreational, and cultural benefits.

2008 River Bluffs Open Space Management Plan: Since its purchase in 2004, LCDNR has prioritized long-term vitality of this property by focusing on planning efforts for ecosystem improvements. In 2024, LCDNR completed its first large-scale restoration project along the Poudre River at the southern end of the property, which successfully met project goals.

Taxpayer Bill of Rights

Larimer County has no TABOR issues and therefore will not impact this application.