



Promoting the Wise Use of all Natural Resources

Initiative: The ability to assess and initiate things independently

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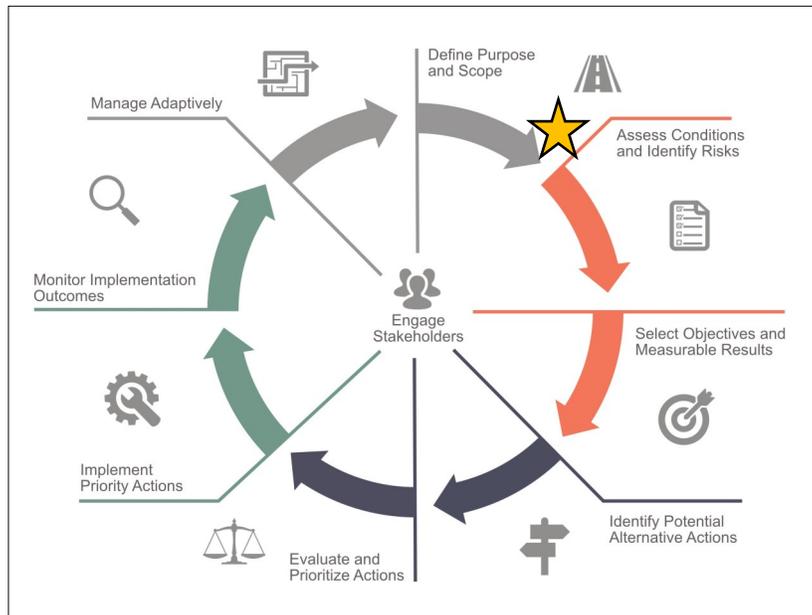
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White River Integrated Water Initiative

What Is The White River Integrated Water Initiative?

The White River Integrated Water Initiative (Initiative) is a locally led process to assess and initiate opportunities to protect and improve the White River and the communities that depend on it. The process has and will continue to engage all interested stakeholders. The stakeholders will identify needs and processes to ensure a healthy river and communities. The following is a standardized planning process set forth by the state that most plans and initiatives follow.



The visual roadmap of the process to create a Stream Management Plan and the WRIWI.

Photo: coloradosmp.org

The WRIWI's current progress location is denoted by a star on the chart.

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Mission Statement (Proposed)

A community-based initiative to identify actions promoting a healthy river that ensures a vibrant agricultural community and maintains healthy fisheries while protecting water rights, quantity, and quality with respect for the local customs, cultures, and property rights.

Overall River Goals for Current and Future Generations (Proposed)

- 1) Protect and preserve existing water rights and other beneficial water uses.
- 2) Protect and enhance water quantity and quality through promoting best management practices for:
 - A. Forest health
 - B. Riparian health
 - C. Rangeland health
 - D. Favorable conditions of streamflow
- 3) Identify opportunities for creation or improvement of infrastructure to support efficient consumptive and non-consumptive uses.
- 4) Support the development and maintenance of efficient and necessary long-term storage solutions that will improve, enhance and ensure irrigation, river health, water quantity, water quality, and native and recreational fisheries.

Behind the Name

The State of Colorado adopted the [Colorado Water Plan](#) in 2016. The Plan proposes to create a water management roadmap to achieve a productive economy, vibrant and sustainable cities, productive ag., a strong environment, and a robust recreation industry. Specific to protecting and enhancing stream flows, the plan calls for 80% of locally prioritized rivers to be covered by Stream Management Plans (SMP) by 2030.

Visit <https://www.coloradosmp.org/> to learn what other communities have done or are doing to fulfil the Colorado Water Plan Goals.

Through this effort, locally led groups are encouraged to develop plans that will help meet the above 80% goal. The Water Plan initially encouraged only SMPs using biological, hydrological, geomorphological, and other data to assess the flows or other physical conditions that are needed to support collaboratively identified environmental and/or recreational values.

However, experience across the State has shown the need to incorporate a more holistic approach including consumptive uses (agriculture, municipalities, energy, etc.). These types of plans are often called an Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP). Local communities are encouraged to determine what they want to accomplish and then find the right planning effort to help them achieve their goals.

In Rio Blanco County, the “White River Integrated Water Initiative” will likely develop an IWMP but will also ensure a more dynamic process allowing for greater flexibility by the local community.

The Beginning Steps to Garner Community Involvement

- 1) Because natural resource planning is one of the primary responsibilities of conservation districts, the Districts offered to lead a process to gauge community interest in developing an IWMP. At the January 2019 White River District Annual Meetings and Water Expo, attendees offered strong support for the Districts to proceed.
- 2) The Districts embarked on the effort to identify community support and what local needs could be met through the development of a plan. For this effort, the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC) made up of 16 entities/representatives was developed.
- 3) In December 2019, District staff conducted 25 interviews of local citizens (identified by the PAC). This information was the starting point for the broader community discussions.
- 4) Four public meetings (Meeker, Rangely, Buford, Piceance Creek) were held to encourage all Rio Blanco County residents to get involved. Approximately 75 people participated in these meetings.
- 5) In response to the public input, the PAC developed a mission statement and project goals that are noted on the front page. The final report from public input and all notes are located on the District’s Website at www.whiterivercd.com.



Community members at public meeting in Meeker.

Priorities Determined Through Public Input

1. Protecting current water rights
2. Water storage—enlarging existing, new, in-ground
3. Water quantity with quality following closely behind, recognizing they are connected.

The Diversion Structure Assessment Scope of Work (SOW)

A Diversion Structure Inventory Subcommittee was developed to create a Scope of Work (SOW) for the project.



- Purpose and Need Statement
 1. Identify and assess opportunities for multipurpose improvements to diversions from the mainstem of the White River and Piceance Creek.
 2. Work with landowners and water rights holders to assess the condition of diversion structures to identify improvement opportunities for irrigation, river health, and fish habitat.
- District and NRCS staff will contact respective water right holders and landowners to determine if they would be willing to participate in the assessment by meeting with and allowing site visits to their water diversion.
- A diversion structure assessment team will complete diversion site visits to identify the following by asking questions and conducting the assessment listed above:
 1. Landowner concerns with the infrastructure
 2. Landowner ideas for improvement that would help diversion efficiency and effectiveness
 3. Discuss opportunities with specialists to improve fish habitat or other resource concerns

Riparian Health Assessments

Riparian health plays a large role in the health of the river and wildlife habitat. The PAC has identified a need for a baseline assessment and more information to determine if / where there are opportunities for improvement. Therefore, there will be a public workshop on riparian health assessments and a team of experts will conduct assessments with landowners in 2021.



STREAM REACHES (SEGMENTS) IDENTIFIED

What studies have already been done on the White River?

Colorado Northwestern Community College Professor, Dr. Mario Sullivan, created a database of studies conducted on the White River and Piceance Creek. The database is divided into the four reaches/ segments, and feature different categories within each reach like temperature regimes, vegetation, discharge, macroinvertebrates, etcetera. The database will be available on the District's website when complete.

Existing Research:

- Water quality parameters have been identified on the White River.
- There is adequate and contemporary data on macroinvertebrate community structures; mainly in the main-stem and Piceance Creek.
- Infrastructure, usage, and yield information is largely found in two reports- Lentsch et al. and the AECOM (both links are provided in the database).
- In partnership with local governments, USGS has collected extensive water quality data for many years
- There is a lack of riparian health assessments and information, as well as diversion structure information.

Lower Reach

- *Longest Reach*
- *Good information on fish community structure (mainly native).*
- *Discharge, flow, and temperature are well characterized.*

Middle Reach

- *Boundaries were selected based on diversions and return flows.*
- *Greatest density of irrigation ditches.*
- *Most information on this reach can be found in the multiple reaches category.*



Upper Reach

- *Discharge regimes are well identified.*
- *Water quality parameters are identified.*
- *Macroinvertebrate community structure data is available.*
- *There is a gap in fish community structure*

Piceance Creek

- *Good data characterizing discharge and temperature.*
- *Some macroinvertebrate data is available.*
- *More fish information is desirable.*
- *Lacking infrastructure, usage, and yield information.*
- *Standalone reach and stream.*

How To Get Involved!

- Visit the Conservation District website “[Water Initiative](#)” tab. There you will find previous meeting notes and reports as well as future meetings and opportunities to provide your ideas.
- Contact a PAC committee member (Member list below) or the Conservation District office.
- Attend PAC meetings—all meetings are noticed in the newspaper and on the District’s [website](#), or call the District Office to be included on the email list.
- Volunteer to serve on a PAC subcommittee for your area by contacting the District Office!
- Read the Conservation Corner articles in the Meeker Herald Times for upcoming information.
- Attend an upcoming public workshop: “Proper Functioning Condition Assessment for Lotic Areas.” (Date: TBD.)

Upcoming Projects and Events

- Conservation Districts will continue seeking grant funding for this project.
- Pending grant funding, the Districts will hire a Project Coordinator to assist in the coordination and facilitation of the PAC, public outreach, input into the process, and draft a plan of work based on public input.
- Throughout the next year, there will be multiple opportunities for public input into the process through meetings, on-line review of documents, etcetera.



Left: Local citizens place their river priorities under the specific heading at a public meeting in Meeker.

Right: Landowners attend an info-session on why a planning effort is important to agriculture in the White River Basin.



Role of the Project Coordinator

The role of the Project Coordinator will be coordination and facilitation of the PAC, ensure robust public outreach and input, communications with all stakeholders, coordinate future projects identified by the PAC, and drafting of the final plan of work for the White River Integrated Water Initiative.

Planning Advisory Committee

- Colorado Parks and Wildlife—David Graf
- Douglas Creek Conservation District—Ron Reich, Rosaly Coombs
- Fishing Representative— Colton Brown, Brett Harvey
- Irrigation Representative— Stu Massey
- Rio Blanco County— Gary Moyer
- Rio Blanco County Farm Bureau— Forrest Nelson, Albert Krueger
- Rio Blanco Stockgrowers— Jon Hill
- Rio Blanco Water Conservancy District— Alden Vanden Brink, Vince Wilczek
- River’s Edge West— Rusty Lloyd, John Leary
- Town of Meeker— Travis Day
- Town of Rangely— Don Reed, Mike Dillion
- Trout Unlimited— Ian Wilson, Brian Hodge
- West Slope Colorado Oil and Gas Association— Steve Hale
- White River Alliance— Deirdre Macnab, Shawn Welder
- White River Conservation District— Chris Collins, Neil Brennan
- Yellow Jacket Water Conservancy District— Walt Proctor

White River and Douglas Creek
Conservation Districts
351 7th Street
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Meeker, CO 81641

Useful Resources

- White River and Douglas Creek Conservation Districts' Website: www.whiterivercd.com
- Colorado Water Plan: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cowaterplan>
- Stream Management Plan Resource Library: <https://www.coloradosmp.org/>

District Board Meetings

Douglas Creek Conservation District

- First Tuesday of the Month at 6:00pm
- 2253 E. Main St., Rangely, CO 81648

White River Conservation District

- Third Monday of the Month at 6:00pm
- Location TBD, Meeker, CO 81641

District Contact Information

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