

February 14, 2014

The Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group

SESSION SUMMARY

Welcome to April Getchius. It will be very helpful to have a Timnath perspective as part of our dialogue.

Goodbye Bill Sears and Rich Shannon. We appreciate the significant contributions you have made to the group over the past 18 months. We will miss each of your unique voices.

What's New on the Poudre?

We heard that North Poudre Irrigation Company is pulling out of the Halligan-Seaman EIS process because their board felt that the cost was becoming significant with no end in sight to the process. They want to use that money for much needed other infrastructure. Though they are no longer a partner in the process, they want to be sure everyone knows that doesn't reflect on their good relationship with the City of Fort Collins.

The Colorado Water Plan the governor has called for will include a "Basin Implementation Plan" from each of the basin roundtables. Since the Poudre is a major part of the South Platte Basin, our input might be especially helpful related to the need to bring folks together to meld the working river/healthy river concepts.

Troy Seaworth's Farming Operation and Ag Water Conservation

Troy told us that after he went to college in Nebraska, he came back to the family farm wanting to improve their management practices, partly to save water. Especially interesting to the group is his use of a Trimble GPS system that allows for him to apply water variably across his fields, since soils have different water holding capacities. He said that converting from flood irrigation to center pivots has changed his historic use of water from 3AF to now just 1.75AF on the same land. Since much of the water he uses is rented water, that translates to savings in a way that it would not if he were using owned water (because of the prohibition against expanding acreage and the requirement to return all water not used consumptively by the crop back to the system.). Good work, Troy!

The "Poudre Water Sharing Working Group"

George Wallace told us about ag/urban water sharing discussions that are happening on the Poudre. He said domestic water providers and ag irrigation companies have formed a group to look at alternatives to "buy and dry" (permanent transfer of water from ag.) The group got a grant from CWCB to work on this issue. They have been meeting monthly for more than a year, and they are conducting a survey and collecting data, with the goal of developing prototype ag/urban agreements. The idea is to increase flexibility in how water is used, perhaps with water swaps, short term leases, or longer term "interruptible supply" leases. What's in it for the cities? George explained that it is hoped that cities could count on ag water for drought firming, rather than base supply.

“Leave the water in ag and use it as an insurance policy for times of drought,” he said. “If farmers permanently sell the water, you take away flexibility.”

Debrief on the Poudre River Forum

We had a lively, upbeat conversation about the success of the Forum—with flowers of appreciation for the efforts of MaryLou, Beth, and Reagan! Here are some of the points made:

- 275 people there, came off extremely well. Good feedback. Lots of ideas for how we might improve the Forum. People liked the venue, the food, having it on Saturday.
- At some point we need to bring out the conflicts—with guidance from Reagan, MLou and Beth as to how we want to handle it. If this group doesn't facilitate that conversation, then who?
- One member said there seemed to be people more familiar with issues than we had expected, so maybe we should go in more depth next time. Another member said people at her table were on the lower end of knowledge and they appreciated the primer approach. Another said that several at his table told him they were planning to take some of the info to their constituencies. He is going to try to get more folks from his constituency there in the future.
- Liked the public involvement, not just professionals like attend the South Platte Forum.
- Our newest member said, “As a neophyte, I thought it was awesome!”
- Our ag representatives want to try to get more ag folks there in the future.
- “It was fun. Let's think of new ways to do things. Maybe one in the summer sometime—incorporating field trip, for instance.
- Still a concern about pumping people up and then not having an answer to “what can I do?”
- Storage plays a key role in improving the health piece too; this topic needs some attention in the future. Philosophies between pro and anti NISP are so different, and the community is getting lost in all of that. At some point, have to educate people about what the perspectives are and what they are based on. A way to start from the base and give people more foundation for them to form educated opinions.
- Though the perception is still that the Poudre is Fort Collins centric, the Greeley mayor and utility director loved it. Good start bringing in the other communities to break down the perception.
- Now we need to dial up the intensity, perhaps have small group discussion around themes, for instance nutrient trading. The audience appeared to want to have dialogue—even more dialogue wished for that we had.

The FORUM initiative group will be meeting the end of March to do further debriefing and begin planning for next year. We will notify the full group about that meeting so that others can join the group.

Future of the Work Group

The year is flying by quickly. Since our “phase 2” meetings were set just through June 5, it is time for us to consider our future. What’s Next? Considerable discussion ensued, and at one point a straw poll showed that most want to maintain informality. The steering committee was asked to take it all into consideration and come back with a proposal for the group to discuss at our April 11 meeting. Here are some of the points that were made:

- In our current form, we might peter out. People can’t afford time to “just chat.” So if we stay informal, maybe we should scale back a bit, not meet so often. Alternatively, we could become a bit more formal, form an entity, be something official. Maybe even hire a general manager. We need to decide one way or the other.
- We went from 0—100 (miles per hour) in this last 18 months. It’s going to be a methodical, plodding process from this point on. Will we be able to keep attention as work on our initiatives?
- Do we want more organizations, more people? Could have 100 organizations. At what point do you say that’s too many?
- We should invite anyone who has ideas and energy to move the goal forward, but only those who are willing to roll up their sleeves to work. Too many people waters things down.
- Likes that we are a hybrid group, not just water professionals. If we go to representing water groups, would we lose diversity? Model of representing a particular organization has the possible limitation of folks devolving to their “canned” positions. Not a good thing. How would we resolve the tension that might bring?
- To get things done, we might need to go to the more formal model, but would hate to lose what we have now. We have been able to find the sweet spots where we can “agree to agree” even though there are people in this room right now that have conflicts between their organizations. That vision/ethic/mission would have to be maintained in the more formal structure—is that possible?
- One of the strengths is the projects we are doing. They wouldn’t have happened without this combination of players.
- It can hurt us not to have a formal identity. If we don’t formalize we may lose opportunities to implement projects. Some confusion has already ensued applying for grant and working with ditch companies, since we are not a formal entity.
- We need to be strategic about who we invite, ask the steering committee to recruit where we have a gap. Not having our meetings open to the public allows us to step away from “stuck” positions.
- Can only grow by a few members if we stay at TAMASAG because of space limitations.
- The Cache La Poudre Water Users Association came together to support the CBT project in the 1930’s. Before then, there was litigation between ditch companies, afterwards not. Having an association gave them structure. They meet annually. Their structure might be something for us to look at as a model.

The association has done wonders for the water users in this region. Legal status: non-profit association (probably a 501- (C) (4).

- When people want to give money they want to know who they are giving it to, but our grant from the Pharos Fund is held in the name of the Colorado Water Institute, so perhaps that isn't a big issue.
- Earlier, thought of our group as THE group to talk through sticky issues, such as mitigation of projects. Now, seeing the group not so much as THE group, but another group.
- We can—and likely should—talk now about storage projects. It might be rough, but we can do it.
- We need to go beyond just the initiatives we have launched and jump into talking about policy. People like projects but have a low tolerance for talking about policy, but policy is the overarching issue. We are a sophisticated enough group to be able to discuss policy.
- Once you start to go beyond projects to a discussion of policy, joint vision, mitigation for a given project, you get into the political realm. Projects help you drive stakes in the ground to build trust, not just between us, but with our policy decision makers.
- We will get to the point where we talk about projects. It's just not the right timing yet. The shared vision process had a lot of potential. This group could be very effective to get into that later. It's good that we have this group set up now so that when those issues come up, we are ready.
- If we were to stay the course—same format as now, is there a sense that folks are willing to stick with it? If we don't go into something more formal, will this keep everyone's interest?
- If these meetings were more frequent would be hard to commit, because we have the Initiatives groups meeting monthly.
- Let's keep going under the Colorado Water Institute without a more formal entity, and find a way to fund the water institute staff. Finding sponsors for the Forum will be easy. We could simplify things by perhaps having membership dues, allowing for different levels of participation. Steering committee and then the work group has 2 different levels. Maybe another level. Really simple. Have some system where everyone pays minimum dues. Get grants where we can.
- I see sort of a hybrid emerging. More formality without creating a new legal entity. Bring a higher level of rigor to what we currently have going.

New Members?

Part of the discussion about our future had to do with transition in membership—some ready to move on, as we have seen lately, and some ready to join the group. We decided that for the most part we should wait to act on reaching out to those who have expressed interest on behalf of their organizations, such as the newly formed Coalition for the Poudre, Weld County, and the Poudre Heritage Alliance. However, we decided to accept the recommendation of the steering committee to immediately invite Richard Raines, manager of Tri-Districts to join the group. Tri-Districts serves domestic water from the Poudre to a large number of taps, and we have from the beginning tried to get them engaged.

What the Initiative Groups are Doing

Dan reported that the FLOWS Initiative Group is looking at a novel approach to develop an augmentation plan as means of increasing flows in the river. They will be meeting soon with Linda Bassi, Colorado Water Conservation Board staff, to try out some of their ideas on her. Zach Smith with Colorado Water Trust is a member of the group and has been quite helpful to the group as they conceptualize possibilities.

Jeffrey reported that the GAGE the RIVER group has support from City of Fort Collins and the Town of Windsor, both of whom have agreed to provide long term maintenance for the gages, though not replacement. The group is applying to the Poudre Heritage Alliance for funds that would be matched by \$3400 we have available from our Pharos Fund grant. We will be installing two gages on bridge piers along with interpretive signs. Jeffrey wants help from our group to come up with the verbiage on the interpretive signs. Our group expressed full support for the project and the sub-group's plans to gather the public on the banks of the Poudre at June rise to "initiate" the gages. It could be framed up as a "media event"—an opportunity to tell the communities about our group.

Also reporting on our RIVER DIVERSIONS EFFORT, Jeffrey discussed the work our subgroup is doing with the shareholders of the Eaton Ditch and the Whitney Ditch in conjunction with Colorado Parks and Wildlife. They are considering consolidating their two diversion structures into one, which would make that stretch of the river more fish friendly. The trick is to make the consolidation affordable or even free to the ditch companies, and insure that water rights are protected. Legal work will be required because a new point of diversion is entailed. Larimer County found volunteers to help clean up flood debris while building rapport. The only resistance encountered has been to the initial idea of "paving the way" for a canoe trail. There is concern about such promoting people leaving their canoes and trespass onto lands of farmers who are on these ditch company boards. The question came up whether it's okay for the folks in our group working on this to use the Poudre Runs Through It name. The group decided that the answer is definitely yes, as long as this is a project of our group.

The FUNDING initiative group has not met recently, but has had informal discussion. We have a long way to go before we are ready to do anything like what the Greenway Foundation has done on the South Platte. It's definitely a long term thing. Ray reminded us that there is a role for philanthropic dollars to play but it will require some public dollars as well. City of Greeley will be coming to our April work session to talk about some of their ideas about a regional approach to these big ideas.

John also reported that the natural resources department is putting together a package of budget items that relate to Poudre work and will be telling council that if we want to be part of working river/healthy river dialogue, we need resources to do it—that he needs more sustainable funding for the work he is trying to do on the river.

Next session is set for April 11. Homework may come in the package of materials for members to read ahead of time for giving input to the South Platte Basin Implementation Plan—to be a part of the Colorado Water Plan.

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