

February 8, 2013

The Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group

SESSION SUMMARY

A healthier *working* river. Say it again—practice saying it! This session more than ever brought home the reality that we need to include the words “working river” whenever we talk about a healthier river. Just having the intent of honoring the working river when we talk about a healthy river is not enough. We have to say the words, because otherwise it may appear that we are glossing over the critical importance of the river as a working river. Light bulbs lit up in several heads as that point came across more clearly than before.

Light bulbs also lit up as we shared our ideas for how to bring “healthier working river” closer to a reality. Some of the ideas were completely unexpected, like mounting an aerial crosswalk across the Poudre to help folks understand the riparian forest aspect. Many of the ideas centered around improving flows, eliminating dry up points, and removing obstacles that impede recreation. Bringing folks together annually in a Poudre forum and educating about the river in a number of ways were recommended. We will hear more ideas in March.

What will we do with these ideas? The steering committee heard suggestions such as “let’s not let this group die in June” and let’s be sure to look at all the ideas through the lens of “that could work IF...”. Reagan assured the group that Colorado Water Institute is ready, willing and able to continue past June in whatever form the ideas might take, but that CWI doesn’t have to remain in the convening role if other preferable options emerge. The point was made that even if various ideas evolve into distinct efforts of their own, there may well be value in continuing this dialogue. The next few months will tell what we do and where we go with these ideas and with the group.

Woodward Governor’s Rocky Scott wowed the group with drawings of the proposed Poudre River Area Development Concept for the Link N Greens site along Mulberry. A significant ecosystem improvement buffer is conceptualized that would be open to the public along the Poudre Trail and the river. That portion of the land would be deeded over to the City of Fort Collins. John Stokes expressed enthusiasm for the project on the part of the City, saying that the project would create quite a mess for a while, but the end result will “really add to downtown and significantly help restore the river.” Lowering the elevation of the buffer zone provides infill to raise the level of the industrial portion of the project and allows for tapping into groundwater to promote growth of native species to be planted along the bank to replace invasive species there now. Work Group members recommended more attention be paid to public access for canoe or raft put-in and take-out, and the need to consider future flows through this area so it doesn’t lose appeal.

Three representatives from the City of Thornton shared their raw water options and treated water options for piping their Water Supply and Storage Company water south. Thirty years after they purchased this water, they are now embarking on their conveyance concept phase, to be followed by design and engineering before the first drop of water would be delivered in

2025. The option labeled their “Poudre River Concept” would have the advantage of gravity flow and reduced pumping costs for a portion of the deliver distance, but the disadvantage of reduced drinking water quality. Keeping the water in the Poudre would improve flows but may complicate diversion operations of other irrigators. Thornton would very much like to form partnerships to work through these issues and is interested in entering a dialogue with our group. The steering committee will consider the best way to move forward.

Carl Brouwer from Northern Water gave us an overview of the proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP). He showed the group a list of communities and water districts, including Fort Collins-Loveland Water District, who are participants in the project. The participants are heavily reliant on C-BT water at present, but given their projected growth, coupled with a dwindling supply of C-BT, will need additional sources of water. They believe that their only other option for meeting anticipated water demand is purchasing water from agriculture.

Maps helped the group to see not only where Glade Reservoir could be built but also how Galeton Reservoir could provide an alternative water supply to the Larimer-Weld Canal and the New Cache Canal, ultimately allowing portions of their historical agricultural supplies to be offset with water from the S. Platte. Mr. Brouwer said that nearly all the environmental issues with the proposed project are Poudre River related, including flow reduction, geomorphology changes, riparian issues and water quality. He anticipates that approval of the project through the NEPA process will require mitigation and enhancement actions that could, he believes, benefit the Poudre. Northern Water and the NISP participants look forward to engaging more with the City of Fort Collins and the community as the NISP planning process progresses, Mr. Brouwer said.

Homework and Next Steps.

As additional ideas are submitted by Work Group members, we will distribute them for review prior to the March session. Members are asked to think through ideas presented and to dialogue with other members to consider ways ideas might be combined, embellished, and strengthened. The next months’ sessions will be critical as we consider what we want to focus on in regard to making the Poudre River a healthier working river.