

May 3, 2013

The Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group

SESSION SUMMARY

Ice cream and a group photo gave us a formal close to our phase 1.



What we accomplished at this session:

We spent most of our time discussing the Steering Committee’s “Next Steps” proposal, developed from the previous session’s input on the subject. Here’s what we agreed on:

CONTINUATION OF WORK GROUP AFTER MAY 3

- Will pause as a group at June 1
- Will let folks off the bus at June 1 who want/need to get off
- Will meet for ½ day meetings every two months through at least June, 2014 depending on what evolves
- The first of these meetings will be in August, 2013.
- The half day meetings will be for the purpose of:
 - Hearing from the initiatives subgroups and offering input and feedback for them
 - Educating each other about anything new we’ve heard about relative to the river
 - Inviting those involved/interested in the Poudre to educate us further (e.g. Poudre Heritage Alliance)
 - Seeing how things evolve and making plans for what comes next
 - Entertaining additional initiatives
 - Assisting with planning for the Poudre River Forum, one our initiatives
- Adding new members of our Work Group should be considered thoughtfully because we have developed a group chemistry that we don’t want to unsettle. The initiative subgroups will be a good place to involve others. Likely any new members of our Work Group will “come up” through these subgroups. A subgroup can nominate someone for membership in the Work Group and the Work Group will decide whether to invite that person to join.

SUBGROUP INITIATIVES

- We verified that we have Work Group backing for the following subgroup initiatives:
 - Ag/urban/environmental cooperation for instream flows and cooperating with Thornton and other regional partners to lead to mutual benefit strategies. Considerable discussion led us to decide that we would respect Thornton’s wish not to be called out separately, but instead to emphasize regional cooperation. We suggested that what we had initially considered to be two initiatives might better be considered as one—because of considerable overlap in the issues to be addressed. Those who signed up for the original two subgroups (essentially the same individuals) will meet together to see if they agree.
 - Long term funding and organization mechanism for working river/healthy river—likely to follow a public funding model similar to that for open space
 - Poudre River Forum--an annual one day event bringing together various individuals and entities involved in the Poudre to seek collaborative approaches for promoting a healthy working river (to be patterned more closely after the South Platte Forum than the Big Thompson Watershed Forum to reflect our broader focus on the working/healthy river mix)
 - Gage the River--an educational tool to help the public grasp the fluctuations of flow on the Poudre

- We will define the initiatives being investigated by the identified subgroups by saying: “We developed several ideas for initiatives, some of which we decided deserve further expansion and pursuit now—perhaps others later. Initiative subgroups will pursue and periodically report on their progress to the larger group.”
- If others, including any of the organizations we work with, choose to take on any of the ideas brought forth out of our Work Group process, they should represent the project as independent from the Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action work group. The ideas we came up with do not belong to us and we have no authority, but if something is to be pursued under our name, we would want to have some control, to assure that it goes forward in a manner consistent with our “working river/healthy river” goals.
- We will allow the slate of other action ideas we generated within the group to be listed for purposes of our report to our Pharos funders, but we would not put them on our website because we had not had time to fully vet them. Instead, in our upcoming meetings, we will see which of them emerge for future consideration of the Work Group. This decision came after considerable dialogue. There were two basic views:
 - Some were concerned that our progress to date would not seem substantial without sharing this larger slate of ideas.
 - Others believed the initiatives we have agreed to focus on reveal considerable progress and were carefully considered to be sure they met the criteria of working river/healthy river. Because we are still at the early stages of building understanding among our constituencies, we should be careful not to list ideas that might be seen as favoring one side or the other of the healthy river/working river balance. We should not list any ideas that have not been fully vetted to assure they meet that criteria.

WRITTEN PROGRESS REPORT

- A written progress report will be prepared, based on suggested changes to the draft report presented at this session for group review. The report will convey our vision, tell who we are, what we are doing, and describe the initiatives we have thus far identified that are being investigated by subgroups. It will say that we have generated additional ideas, but that they have not yet surfaced for subgroup action. Our audience for this report will be our employers, the groups with which we are affiliated, and regional leaders. It will be available on our website and likely form the basis for a press release.

PROPOSED COMMUNITY LEADERS LUNCHEON IDEA TO BE TABLED FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

- Ray Caraway and the Community Foundation of Northern Colorado agreed to host an informal luncheon to which a few key leaders from the Poudre communities of Fort Collins, Greeley, and Windsor would be invited. Work Group members would have an informal dialogue sharing with these leaders what we have accomplished and what we are planning going forward. However, we agreed that it is premature to stage such an event.

JANUARY COMMUNITY ROLL OUT AS PART OF THE POUUDRE RIVER FORUM

- Because we do not feel we are ready for the earlier conceptualize June 1 community rollout, we will wait to stage such in conjunction with the first Poudre River Forum.

We briefly heard from one of our group members, Steve Malers, who has just launched a new non-profit called Open Waters Foundation. Steve's efforts will be of considerable assistance to us as we move forward because his emphasis is on making water data accessible and transparent to improve potential for it to be used to make collaborative decisions. Steve is working with others on a Poudre River Wiki that we will be hearing more about. (Our Poudre Runs Through It website has a link to it.)

We discussed bridge funding to sustain our group through this next phase. The same subgroup working on the long term funding and organization initiative has been working to secure the approximately \$40,000 we will need to cover facilitation and meeting costs for another year. The subgroup has secured a pledge of \$15,000 already. We agreed that we should develop a "solicitation" letter that each of us would share with our employers and the pertinent groups with whom we are affiliated to give them the opportunity to support the efforts of our group. The letter can be customized to meet the needs of any particular organization as requested by work group participants.

We received a brief update from the subgroup working on the ag/urban/environmental cooperation for flows initiative.

- The subgroup has been talking to Linda Bassi from CWCB and Zach Smith from Colorado Water Trust to learn more about possibilities

- The Cache la Poudre Water Users Association has expressed this is something they can support and even spearhead if what we come up with is within water rights framework and money is forthcoming
- If the Cache la Poudre Water Users are supportive, the majority of water users might be behind it because of their clout. Would eliminate a lot of fear.
- There are informal actions we can work on in addition to a formal instream flow designation. Improvement in flows boils down to how much, where, and who is going to pay for it.
- City of Fort Collins is moving forward talking to Colorado Parks and Wildlife who identify what the minimum stream flow should be on a particular reach. It will take a number of years to work through this process, but “we are inching forward.”
- Question: what stretch will be designated? Will it correspond to the dry-up points?
- Answer: we will start with a small stretch through Fort Collins and stay focused on that small piece to begin with
- City of Fort Collins, in looking at the stretch from the mouth of the canyon to I-25, is looking at diversion structures and talking to ditch companies already. An example of this is the Josh Ames structure upstream of the Shields Street Bridge which no longer delivers water to anyone.

We heard from the subgroup working on the Gage the River initiative.

- The gage(s) will indicate CFS (cubic feet per second) to give a better understanding of the fluctuation of river flows in the same location at different times
- The group has identified several alternative locations—one of them downtown Fort Collins. They will have to get the OK from folks like City of Fort Collins, Town of Windsor.
- They have located interpretive sign and hydrologist volunteers willing to do the first site
- This is an opportunity to bring together disparate interests

One of our work group participants, the former Poudre River Commissioner, George Varra, invited the current Poudre River Commissioner, Mark Simpson, to participate in our session. We asked Mark to respond to what he had seen so far from our group, especially related to the initiative on improving river flows. Mark indicated that he is most interested in what we are thinking in regard to measurement and diversion improvements on the river. The group shared some of its thinking in this regard, including:

- Any improvements would be based on a case by case analysis
- Any improvements would need to provide mutual benefit—for the irrigator and for the health of the river
- Funding for improvements cannot be expected to come from the ditch company or individual irrigators, but from all those promoting the improvement for river health
- How you word this is important. Not “there is something wrong with your diversion structure” but showing the mutual benefit
- There are maybe 30 diversion structures in need of improvements

We closed our session (and our scheduled eight meeting series which will now be dubbed “phase one”) with a pep talk from John Stulp, Governor Hickenlooper’s Special Water Advisor and Chair of the Interbasin Compact Committee (IBCC). Mr. Stulp congratulated the group for its hard work. He said processes like this throughout the state are starting to make a difference and that the governor is very supportive of them. Before, groups with different opinions about water “lawyered up” and met in a courtroom instead of around a table like ours. He pointed out that we will have growth in the state (“half of it from our own kids and grandkids”) and water resources will become even tighter. He said we can still have a great quality of life, but it will require creative tradeoffs, the likes of which our group is working on. He closed by saying “Don’t let perfection get in the way of progress.”