

October 15, 2013

The Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group

SESSION SUMMARY

Goodbye and a hearty thanks to Steve Smith

Happy retirement wishes to Steve were accompanied by a robust round of applause for all he has brought to the group the past year. We will truly miss you, Steve.

Report Out: what's happening out there related to the river?

Part of our agenda in Phase 2 will be an opportunity for participants to report on things that are happening related to the river, to bring others up to speed. This meeting we learned:

- Jeffrey Boring now represents Larimer County on the South Platte Basin Roundtable
- Coalition for the Poudre (formed in response to wildfires) is advertising for an executive director
- Metro Roundtable and South Platte Basin Roundtable are working on a combined Basin Implementation Plan in conjunction with the Governor's call for a Colorado Water Plan. Maybe as some of it is developed, Jeffrey and Mark Kolebar (Metro Roundtable) could share it with us. Opportunity for our input?

How Did the Poudre Fare in the Flood?

Dan Baker from CSU and Ken Sampley from City of Fort Collins Stormwater shared information with us, as did several of our own members. We learned:

- **AGRICULTURE PERSPECTIVE** Ag diverters did not see much damage, and got the benefit of getting some reservoir storage. Larimer and Weld's reservoir actually overtopped. North Poudre's Munroe Diversion wasn't harmed, but their Fossil Creek Diversion was destroyed. Halligan Reservoir started out with 833 AF at the beginning of the event and reached 6400 AF—full to the brim—before it was over. Having reservoirs to fill definitely minimized damage in town. Northern Water's east/slope diversion structure on the Big Thompson was destroyed. They hope to get it back on line in the next six months.
- **URBAN PERSPECTIVE** From Fort Collins' perspective, the flood was the largest flood event since 1930. It was considered anywhere from a 50 year event to a 500 year event, depending on which part of the city you were in. The debris removal is expected to cost \$1M.
- **ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE** One of the issues to be addressed is how much debris to remove, and how much to leave for habitat. Natural banks fared better than engineered ones. The flood brought an important moisture flux up into the riparian areas along the river. Sediment conditions are more heterogeneous now. The flood flushed a lot of fine material away and deposited some large material, which is good. It hit at a critical point in the life cycle of certain bugs but they will recover. Since brown trout spawn in the fall, that may be a problem this year, but on the other hand, the flood created more spawning habitat. Even an event this big doesn't get rid of vegetation that encroaches the river during drought. Water in the river is sparkling now—the flood cleaned

everything out. But there is still burned material up above that will have to come down in coming seasons.

If we can do it on the South Platte, you can do it on the Poudre!

Jeff Shoemaker from the Greenway Foundation showed us a video of the South Platte running through Denver—as far back as 1965 and today. What a difference! He pointed out that in 1965, the South Platte in Denver was considered ecologically dead, and it was a dumping ground. Last year, the mayor of Denver cited the South Platte River as his #1 top priority for new and sustainable jobs for the City and County of Denver. What changed? Shoemaker gave us a quick view of what the Greenway Foundation has accomplished as it follows a model based on four P's: Private, political, public, and philanthropy. He spoke about a river vision implementation plan that came out of a process in which they took all the recommendations and set 3-5 year priorities as well as 5-10 year priorities. In 2011, they identified \$75 million of recommended improvements and since then have raised \$22.5 million. The efforts they fund fall into the categories of enhancements, education, employment, and events. Discussion about our opportunities on the Poudre included the point that we may have a different vision for the Poudre than the Greenway Foundation has for the South Platte, but what's important is forming a vision and then gearing up to make it happen. Citing the importance of engaging in partnerships and defining a game plan, Shoemaker said, "Just get in the room and collaborate!"

What about the 40+ ideas we generated last spring?

Are there any we want to revisit? Reagan reminded us that if you take a look at the slides we compiled of the various ideas, we are actually doing more of them than you would think and we are definitely setting the stage for some of them. John Bartholow and Reagan passed out a one page document (check it out on the website) fleshing out ideas for the **Treetop Perspective** idea. John said he wanted to "plant a seed for the idea" and see where it goes. The idea is to get people up into the forest so they can better see what's happening below. Discussion:

- Might be an ideal way for folks to picture the cottonwoods transitioning to hardwood
- Would be "an awesome addition to the Poudre Trail"
- Could be a new concept for trails—elevate the trail through the trees
- DDA might be interested in pursuing—would like John to give a presentation to their board
- Might pose some challenges related to engineering, flood management, wildlife, especially if it were sited near Lee Martinez Park

Jeffrey Boring brought up his earlier idea of a **Canoe Trail**. He showed a slide depicting a five mile stretch of the river between the River Bluffs Open Space (in Larimer County) and Eastman Park (in Weld County) where only two physical impediments stand in the way of realizing such a trail—the Eaton Diversion and the Whitney Ditch Diversion. The latter was damaged by the flood. What if the repairs could be made in such a way as to facilitate canoe passage in the future? Colorado Parks and Wildlife has expertise available, we heard from our two visitors Ken Kehmeier and Pete Conovitz. The work group encouraged Jeffrey to pursue the potential by reaching out to the ditch company to see if they would entertain assistance in finding funding for such a venture.

The FLOWS group is flowing right along—with a big experiment under their belt!

We heard a report from our FLOWS initiative group that they undertook an experiment in August in which the City of Fort Collins agreed to change the timing of their annual release of CBT waters down the Poudre. In the past, they have run these waters in one big release in October. Instead, they worked with the City's Natural Resources Department, New Cache Irrigating Company, and Mark Simpson, the river commissioner to make the release more gradually—in an effort to positively affect August and September flows that can be damagingly low. The flood intervened, and there were some other issues that surfaced that need to be thought through if they want to try the experiment again next year. Everyone acknowledges it will be a struggle documenting how such a release helps, but it should have a temperature and habitat benefit. We can learn some lessons from this “proof of concept” the group agreed.

The first annual Poudre River Forum is forming up nicely and Gage the River planning is proceeding.

John Stokes updated the work group on the progress being made by the FORUM initiative subgroup. He indicated the committee is aiming at an audience of 400. Ideas advanced by work group members included having an outdoor component, rethinking the initial plan of having the event on a Saturday, and staging the event at the Discovery Center—since it is right on the river (but likely too small for 400 and perhaps perceived as Fort Collins-centric.) Our December work group meeting will include a detailing of plans and ways for the work group to get involved in marketing the forum.

On the subject of our **Gage the River** initiative, Jeffrey Boring pointed out that the flood might have some impact on the earlier planned location for the gages and their interpretive signs. He reminded us that we will be applying to the Poudre Heritage Alliance for partial funding of the signs and that the \$3400 match needed for that source of funding was included in our grant proposal to the Pharos Fund of the Bohemian Foundation.

NEXT SESSION: December 9 (changed from December 13)

We will hear from City of Fort Collins Natural Resources on the Eco-system Response Model they have been working on the past 18 months. Robert Ward from Poudre Heritage Alliance will share with us what that group is doing. We will spend time gearing up for the Poudre River Forum!