

September 30, 2014

The Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group

SESSION SUMMARY

Flowing Along the Poudre East to Greeley

What a gorgeous fall day to once again explore the Poudre! This time we headed east to the Poudre Learning Center, hosted by the City of Greeley. On our way we made two stops:

- New Cache diversion structure. Dale Trowbridge showed us where the company first takes water from the Poudre, based on its water right that goes back to 1878 when the Union Colony dubbed it the Greeley #2. (Greeley #3 was the first of the four planned canals to be built, used for residential gardens and town parks; Greeley #4 became what we know today as Larimer/Weld Irrigation Company's Eaton Ditch; #1 never got built!) The word "New" in the New Cache name is actually quite old. They got that name in 1898 just twenty years after they began to take water.
- Gage the River—future site for one of the two signs we are putting in place to show the public what we mean by CFS—cubic feet per second. Jeffrey Boring showed us where the sign will go as we stood beneath the bridge just off State Highway 392 near the Frank Wildlife Area. A challenge will be the changing of the river over time and how to mount the gage to best reflect the flow over time.

Golf Carts along the Poudre

Some have floated the Poudre, some have hiked the Poudre, but we golf carted the Poudre! Becky Safarik, City of Greeley assistant city manager, and Harold Evans, City of Greeley Water Board president shared the history of Greeley and Windsor's end of what is today almost a continuous trail along the Poudre from Greeley's Island Grove Park all the way to the west end of Fort Collins. We learned:

- In the 1970's a CU student was funded to do a feasibility study for a regional river trail route along the Poudre.
- A Greeley blue ribbon Greenway Commission was established during the 80's to begin a master plan for the trail
- Greeley and Windsor received GOCO funding to build the first portions of the trail between 1993-1996. 17 years later, now the trail runs 21+miles.
- Greeley's Poudre River Initiative is still going strong, building on the vision of the early Union Colony pioneers who first tapped the river for the new community's gardens and parks.
- The trail is more than just a bike path. Other recreation opportunities along the trail include fishing and water crafts. Stewardship efforts along the trail include soil management, revegetation of native grasses, and protection of the river channel as well as attention to the trail's rookeries and its importance as a wildlife corridor.

Back to School—Poudre Learning Center

Our business meeting was held in what used to be the Hazelton School. Now it's the Poudre Learning Center, whose purpose is "to showcase the importance of the Cache la Poudre River to the wildlife, vegetation, and agricultural/municipal uses it supports." The PLC is a joint effort of the City of Greeley, Greeley-Evans School District 6, and the Poudre Trail Corridor, Inc. (the non-profit that manages the cooperative effort among the City of Greeley, the Town of Windsor and Weld County to develop the Poudre River Trail.)

First session of the Poudre Runs Through It Phase 3

Kicking off the third year of our group, we

- Revisited and re-endorsed our group operating guidelines
- Decided to submit a letter about our grassroots effort to the Colorado Water Plan
- Heard reports about various initiatives we are undertaking
- Discussed if and how we might undertake a dialogue about upcoming storage/infrastructure decisions to be made that affect the Poudre, for instance the Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP) and the Thornton Pipeline.

Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group Operating Guidelines

We agreed that all of the 16 guidelines adopted 2 years ago continue to serve us well. We discussed and clarified a guideline we believe to be particularly important, "Use discretion when sharing what was said in the group with others outside the group." We agreed that when we originally adopted that guideline, our intent was not to prohibit talking about what we covered in the group, but to avoid attributing anything said to a particular individual. In our discussion, the following points were made:

- Appropriate to share what is said in the group outside the group if it furthers the mission of the group.
- Trying as much as possible to set aside our organizational affiliations was an early decision of the group—a liberating decision that gives us a different kind of a discussion than we otherwise could have had. But it is important for the group to understand that in the spirit of creative thinking someone might say something that if it got back to his organization could be a problem.
- We want to be free to take back to our own constituencies good ideas we pick up in our sessions, but we have to be sensitive to how information shared might be misconstrued.
- Keep up the good will in the group. Then, if and when we have a mishap, address it and go on.

We agreed to add the attribution language to this particular guideline. It now reads: "Use discretion when sharing what was said in the group with others outside the group. Avoiding attributing anything said to a particular individual." New copies of the guidelines will be distributed.

Progress: River Diversions Improvements Initiative

Wade Willis gave an update on the work of his group, indicating that Northern Water has joined the effort, thinking that this particular effort might be an example of mitigation that could be done as part of the NISP. We are planning a 5-6 hour field trip to show the two ditch companies we are working with some structures that have been improved, including one in Platteville and one on the St. Vrain. Sandwiches for the outing will come from our internal funding that includes Pharos Fund grant as well as contributions from various employers and organizations of our members.

Storage/Infrastructure Projects: If and How to Engage in Dialogue

Reagan Waskom kicked off the discussion by asking steering committee members and others to share the diverse thinking that came out recent discussions, in order to set the stage for full group consideration of the question. Here were the points made by those individuals:

Background

- At our first session, October; 2012, we agreed we did not want to become the “NISP debate society.”
- Though we knew NISP and other proposed projects would impact the river, we believed that we could best establish goodwill and communication within our group by setting aside deliberation about the proposed projects.
- PRTI was built on the idea that we could put aside our differences and concentrate on what we could work on together—for win-wins. We would not spend time on things we felt we could not influence.

Reasons NOT to engage in dialogue now

- There is already an established process, the Army Corps of Engineers process. We won't know the facts until the draft EIS comes out. Trying to impact that process as a group would be a big effort, very time consuming.
- Some of our members cannot comment because they have to stay mum because of the EIS process.
- Scientists think in terms of facts, but this is a question of both values and facts. We have not come to terms with that as a group.

Stick to general concepts instead of project specifics

- Can we have a discussion about buckets? The pros and cons of storage without getting into the nitty-gritty of the projects? It's a completely managed river already, so storage and delivery is a part of it. Perhaps we should start with that—help each other understand the place for storage and infrastructure, benefits and opportunities as well as the general downside.

Northern Water is looking for ideas now—before the Draft EIS is released

- The conservancy district promoting NISP on behalf of multiple communities is looking for a group of practitioners to offer ideas for how to meet multiple goals

on the river. Such a group could help them vet some ideas now, before the draft EIS is released. How might they serve up water in some fashion to improve the river? Such a group could be part of the instream flow filings down the road. If not the Poudre Runs Through It group, then who?

Poudre Runs Through It as Public Educator about the NEPA process

- Our group might take on the educational mission of informing the public about how the permitting process works, NEPA, EIS, etc.
- Could be part of the upcoming Poudre River Forum or a separate event(s)

We need to educate ourselves first

- Before we would go out into a public forum, we need to educate ourselves first. Whatever we do in terms of having a dialogue, we need to stay educational, not take positions. This group has to represent a balanced view. Not necessarily neutral. We need to work this out internally before we “go live.”

Following these framing points made by individuals, Reagan opened up the discussion to the full group. Here are points that were made:

- Great opportunity here, serving as a mitigation clearinghouse.
- We should be willing to talk about any project in the basin that affects the river. If we find ourselves divided or not proactive in such a dialogue, we can stop the dialogue. We have the potential to improve any project because we are diverse. Mitigation is changing in recent years to encompass social values.
- Would rather we be proactive instead of reactive, to not later be in the position of saying “we could have put a fish ladder there, if we had known it.” We should discuss the projects to avoid seeing water go down the river that could have been used for ag, urban, environmental purposes.
- Talking about specifics before the EIS comes out won’t get us very far. Parks and Wildlife and others are already talking about mitigation, but it is not public yet.
- To manage the river we have to have some kind of storage, some way to move water around. Would welcome having this group and maybe the Forum focus on the need for storage in the Poudre River Basin. How much water comes down the Poudre each year, how much might be available in a given year to store? What kind of storage could meet various values? Gravel pits, aquifer storage, benefits to different kinds of storage. Storage in a broader sense as a topic of this group, and maybe the Forum.
- It’s not just dialogue about NISP we need to think about. What about the Thornton pipeline? Thornton doesn’t have an EIS or NEPA process hanging over it right now, but at some point they will want to engage in dialogue about their plans. If they go talk to Weld County, Larimer County, etc. how will the input of PRTI be taken? This group could provide input to Thornton because we are a

diverse, influential group. We should consider being a group that gives input on these kinds of things.

- Willing to talk to Thornton about their project and generate ideas from this group.
- As a member of the recreation industry, it's important for me to hear the dialogue.
- You can't talk about a car and leave out one important part of the car.
- How does this conversation get structured?
- Seems like when people are talking, there's progress.
- There are risks to having this dialogue. We could cause great harm to the relationships we have built if we get into the divisiveness of the projects.
- We need to bring back the banner we had at our early meetings. Instead of "we CANNOT do that BECAUSE.... our attitude should be "we CAN do that IF." In this case the slogan can read, "We can have this dialogue IF... and then set out the parameters of what will allow us to have a dialogue without causing harm to the long term relationships we have built.

In closing, Reagan summarized the discussion with this: "What I think I am hearing is that we need to put together a proposal for what a dialogue would look like. We need to make a deliberate choice about this. What if the steering committee and Brad came up with a proposal based on what we discussed today?" The group agreed to that approach. The steering committee will meet and bring back a plan to the full group at its November 14 session.

Who Are We/What Might We Become?

The issue about if and how we address specific storage/infrastructure projects led to a continuation of past dialogue about the future of the group. We discussed whether we are keeping the interest of group members, given that our attendance is down somewhat the last two sessions. How can we keep the gusto going? Now that we have lost a couple of "business interest" members, do we need to take a new look at representation? How do those who are conducting business on the part of the group, such as the River Diversions Improvement initiative get across the point that it is the Poudre Runs Through It that is heading up the action, even though several different entities are engaged? We acknowledged that we are evolving, and reminded ourselves that we made the conscious decision in April to launch Phase 3 through December 2015 to keep working on our initiatives and considering others. We charged the steering committee at that time to come back to us with a recommendation about what happens post-12/31/15. All our members have been given a letter asking their employers and organizations with which they are affiliated to make financial contributions to support the operations of the group through this Phase 3. Meanwhile, we decided that it would be helpful if we had an official Poudre Runs Through It letterhead, with our members' names running down the side of the page.

Other Business

- The group would like an opportunity to vet ideas the Poudre River Forum committee is developing before they are finalized
- If we begin to think toward some sort of regional funding effort, we may need to start with some sort of master plan. Perhaps it is a matter of putting together the plans that already exist among the various entities, seeing where there is a gap. Line up the plans, look for the gaps and opportunities for collaboration. The challenge will be how to leverage local control and initiative with a regional vision, building off the long term vision of the 1860's
- Jeffrey agreed to draft a communication from our group to the Colorado Water Plan, with Steve's help. That communication should tell about our grassroots effort as an example of what could happen elsewhere to bring divergent voices together for collaborative action.
- Matt Robenault reported that new design and development guidelines for the River District between Old Town Fort Collins and the Poudre have recently been adopted. The guidelines will help unify the area.
- The Poudre WIKI we are linked to via our website is hard to connect with and seems focused on the CSU Water Archives. It appears to be mechanically based on something other than Wikipedia. How can anyone contribute? Will the Poudre Yellow Pages some of us helped develop as a project of the Conservation Exchange reside there? Will the ideas generated at the upcoming Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon about Water find their way to the Poudre Wiki? MaryLou will look into these questions.
- We are cooperating with the Poudre Heritage Alliance to produce an animation on the History of the Poudre River. PHA is funding it but we are in charge of the first draft and carrying it through to animation stage with input from PHA and others. Tom Cech from One World, One Water at MSU-Denver has volunteered to write the first draft. Brian Werner was recommended as a good reviewer. Click here [Animated History](#) to view the South Platte Groundwater animation which is an example of the media form we will be taking for this Poudre animation.
- The Perspectives on the Poudre series at CSU is underway, and several of our members are giving presentations. We are cooperating with the Center for Collaborative Conservation to put on the series, which includes a culminating World Café to which the public is invited. Members of our group are encouraged to participate in the World Café but need to RSVP as the venue is space limited. <http://www.collaborativeconservation.org/events/world-cafe-perspectives-poudre>

Next session, back at TAMASAG for breakfast at 7:30 sharp, finishing by noon.