

# Crystal River Stream Management Plan

■ February 2015 ■



Photo courtesy of  
Thompson Divide Coalition

*The goal of the Crystal River Stream Management Plan is to identify, prioritize and guide management actions that honor local agricultural productivity, preserve existing water uses, and enhance the ecological integrity of the river.*

Since December, the Project Team has been busy collecting and synthesizing data for Crystal River flow modeling. In April, we will continue with the ecological evaluations used to generate additional layers in our Decision Support System. The following provides additional information related to the process. We thank you for your input so far and look forward to your ongoing collaboration.

**Crystal River Conversations.** On November 5<sup>th</sup>, Remy Halm of Rubicon Water in Fort Collins presented information about smart headgate technologies- fully integrated, remotely operated systems to measure and control water from diversion to the field and match supply with demand. Questions and feedback included concerns about efficacy in small ditches and system costs. To learn more about Rubicon visit their website [www.rubiconwater.com](http://www.rubiconwater.com). On December 2<sup>nd</sup>, Drew Peternell and Aaron Kindle of Trout Unlimited joined the Crystal River community for a discussion on the recent Outstanding Waters designation in Thompson Divide and restoration projects around the state that seek to preserve agricultural operations while addressing stream health and trout habitat. The State's Outstanding Waters designation seeks to protect and maintain existing high water quality and habitat. Because this designation was granted where cattle grazing already occurs, it underscores the compatibility between responsible agriculture and stream protection. Restoration projects including riparian fencing, fish passage, instream habitat restoration and stream flow improvement were highlighted with examples from the Gunnison River and Ohio Creek. For more information visit [www.coloradotu.org](http://www.coloradotu.org).

**CRYSTAL RIVER CONVERSATIONS 3:  
Water Rights and Storage with Chris Treese of the Colorado River District  
MARCH 2015**



Photo courtesy of Thompson Divide Coalition

**Stream Management Planning.** The success of our local economies and the high quality of life in Western Colorado depend on the ability of our streams and rivers to support a variety of uses. Several river basins in western Colorado adopted, or plan to adopt, stream management plans (SMPs) to explore and discuss management options that align with social, aesthetic, and recreational values while supporting the vitality of local economies and agricultural productivity. SMPs typically provide a comprehensive review of stream characteristics using available data, maps, and stakeholder input to recommend a set of management strategies for a given river. SMPs can be used to address a multitude of water-related issues such as sedimentation and erosion, flooding risk and

mitigation, drinking water quality and supply, agricultural and industrial water supply, water storage, urban runoff, and habitat for aquatic life. Once adopted, these plans are meant to assist water users in planning, management, mitigation and restoration.

In addition to the Crystal River, SMPs are underway in Grand and Summit Counties. In Grand County, the SMP covers 80 miles in the Upper Colorado River Basin - focusing on the Colorado and Fraser Rivers, and ten tributaries.

Stakeholders are committed to maintaining a healthy stream system “through the protection and enhancement of aquatic habitat while at the same time protecting local water uses, and retaining flexibility for future water operations.” Stakeholders in Summit County are developing an SMP to evaluate and prioritize restoration and multi-use projects on Colorado River tributaries including Blue River, Tenmile Creek, Snake River, Straight Creek, and Swan River. Until recently, the primary motivation for stream management planning exercises in Colorado grew solely out of needs identified by local communities. Currently, input from the Colorado River Basin Roundtable to the draft Colorado Water Plan identifies development of stream management plans across the basin as a high-priority objective. Stay tuned for details of a future Crystal River Conversation featuring representatives from other watersheds sharing their experiences.

**Ag Water Efficiency Legislation.** The State legislature is currently drafting an agricultural efficiency bill based on SB14-023, which was vetoed by the governor in the last session. The 2015 bill would create a pilot program in West Slope water districts to allow for the voluntary transfer of agricultural efficiency savings to the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) for instream uses from the point of diversion to point of historic return. It also proposes that the water right holder may

permanently change the water right through a water court decree if so desired.

The CWCB-administered program would allow for up to 12 approved pilot projects, with up to 5 in any one water division. Pilot projects must run for a minimum of 5 years and maximum of 10 years. The CWCB and State Engineer must approve guidelines for the operation and



*Photo courtesy of Scott Gillilan*

administration of the pilot projects to assure that the project will maintain stream conditions in time, manner, place and amount to avoid material injury to other water rights holders. Any water used under a pilot program is not subject to abandonment.

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**Upcoming Events:**

2/11,18,25: Colorado Mesa 2015 Water Course: Water for Agriculture [www.coloradomesa.edu/watercenter](http://www.coloradomesa.edu/watercenter)  
 2/26: Governor’s Forum on Colorado Agriculture in Denver [www.governorsagforum.org](http://www.governorsagforum.org)

**Agricultural Representative Needed!**

The Colorado Basin Roundtable, one of nine watershed-based Roundtables statewide, has a vacancy in its at-large agricultural seat. The main objective of the Roundtable is to plan for how to deal with water-supply gaps in the basin and all of Colorado. Current concerns include future water planning that does not put Western Colorado agriculture at risk for losing its water rights, either through buy and dry or overdevelopment of the Colorado River. The group is also focused on the environmental and recreational sustainability of the basin, which is directly linked to the success of agriculture. Core beliefs include the state using the resources it has to the fullest before further depleting the river and/or decimating Ag. The Roundtable is also trying to plan for in-basin agricultural, environmental and drinking water needs through its Basin Implementation Plan. Questions and letters of interest can be forwarded to Jim Pokrandt, the CBRT