**Upper San Juan Watershed Enhancement Partnership**

January 10, 2019 Meeting Notes

**Location:** CSU Extension Office 344 US-84, Pagosa Springs, CO

**Time:** 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

**Next Steering Committee Meeting:** Feb. 1, 2019

**Action Items:**

* Continue gathering public input via survey, public outreach (newspaper & online), other local groups like San Juan Headwaters, etc. (MSI & Steering Committee)
* Reach out to other partner/stakeholders s to involve (MSI & Committee, see table below)
* Compile top issues, questions, and opportunities from group discussions (MSI)
* Adjust map/scope & update on website (MSI)
* Compare public meeting feedback with web survey results in chart for next meeting (MSI)
* Update MSI website with more stakeholder resources: SMP basics and examples (MSI)
* Review reporting/deliverable schedule requirements for grant (MSI)

**Group Discussion Highlights:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Scope** | Focus on Upper San Juan, Navajo and Blanco watersheds, but potential to expand in future. |
| **Top Issues** | 1. Balancing all water uses and users on private & public lands 2. Lack of education/communication on CO water law, water rights, access 3. Forest & river systems health—human & biological impacts 4. Drought & subsequent restrictions/priorities 5. Water conservation/regulation—inefficient infrastructure, monitoring |
| **Opportunities** | 1. Funding for collaborative projects, for multiple uses 2. Education: water rights/laws, diversion & dam operations, conservation, access 3. Improve Collaboration/Communication 4. Needs Assessment/Priority Identification 5. Drought Planning |
| **New Partners to Involve** | 1. County staff (Alvin Scheff?) 2. Land owners (HOA, ranches) 3. Land & water trust/alliance groups 4. Ditch companies 5. Fire groups (FireWise) |
| **Information Needed** | 1. Current, accurate watershed use (amount, timing, duration, individual/group users, diversion dam operations, irrigation method, protections/priorities. 2. Current local challenges: political, economic, social, ecologic 3. Potential impacts from climate change, land use/development, and population growth. |

**Steering Committee Members:** Al Pfister, Tim Harmann, Chris Pitcher, John Taylor, Mely Whiting, Justin Ramsey, Pat Bennet, Celene Hawkins, James Dickhoff, Tobi Rowher, Robin Young.

**Advising:** Chester Crabb (DOWR), Joni Vanderbilt (USFS), Cynthia Purcell (NRCS)

**Notes:**

1. **Introductions – Aaron Kimple (Mountain Studies Institute)**
   * Messages
     1. Thanks for attendance, efforts and input. Why we’re here:
        + Ensure this is a community informed and directed effort.
        + Identify drought concerns, local resource conservation, opportunities to maintain all existing uses, and develop resilience for the future.
     2. Purpose:
        + Explain goals, objectives, potential scale/scope of projects, schedule, funding opportunities, introduce Steering Committee & advisory figures, and MSI’s role.
        + Partnership in coordination with existing groups/initiatives for a cohesive plan.
     3. Map:
        + Initial estimate of boundaries. Grant written for Upper San Juan, but potential to include other tributaries and land use.
        + Option to focus on Upper San Juan, Navajo and Blanco watersheds to demonstrate successes, then expand to include Piedra, if desired. Clarified Chama is not included in partnership, Colorado only.
     4. Schedule:
        + Frequency of steering committee (monthly) versus stakeholder/public meetings (quarterly).
        + Opportunity for public to check partnership’s progress, provide feedback and direction. Local contacts will advertise meeting times and locations.
     5. Stakeholder participation:
        + Essential throughout entire process. Help by asking questions, completing questionnaire, attending meetings, and staying informed through MSI’s website.
     6. Intention:
        + Gather information, address concerns, identify opportunities, and develop an adaptive plan.
2. **What is a Stream Management Plan? – Celene Hawkins (Nature Conservancy, CWCB Board Member)**
   * Explain Colorado Water Plan: statewide effort, confirmed in 2015, intended to gather info on water usage and needs on regional, river basin, and watershed levels. State recognized gaps in environmental and recreation needs vs. other consumptive uses.
   * State is not requiring changes in water rights or usage; rather plan is meant to provide funding for voluntary, locally-driven efforts to meet their community’s watershed needs. Labeled Stream Management Plan funding, but many options on funding use.
   * All users need to be at the table, not just environmental and recreation, to create multiple-use solutions that benefit all interests/values.
   * Contact Celene for assistance with this available funding.
   * Budget available? Fluctuates, but estimated at $10-20 million/year, with possibility of increases this year. Depends on the scale of the project.
3. **Our local effort –**
   * Issues facing the San Juan River? – Introduce panel/Steering Committee of diverse Pagosa stakeholders.
     1. **Pat Bennett (Ditch Management)**
        + Background: local homestead family legacy.
        + Concerns: demographics changing, need education on rural water law & usage, change image of ranchers/agriculture to stewards with vested interest and dependent livelihoods.
        + Encouraged by lack of regulation, ditch users adjusting water use. Need to develop mutually beneficial uses of water for entire community.
     2. **Justin Ramsey (PAWSD)**
        + Collect, treat, and distribute surface water from the San Juan to Pagosa residents, without any groundwater involved.
        + Community saw a 2% growth/usage last year, but water production peaked in 2008 and has decreased since. Potentially influenced by economy but also local water conservation.
     3. **Tobi Rowher (Pagosa Outside)**
        + Background: local boating/recreating entire life.
        + Encouraged by recreation interests represented.
        + Concerns: livelihoods/businesses dependent on water levels. Need balance between all water uses.
     4. **Ryan Unterreiner (CO Parks & Wildlife)**
        + Background: Water Resource Specialist for region of 4 areas, works with Park biologists and managers.
        + Concerns: increased water temps, sedimentation, public recreation access/management, and fish population/habitat.
        + In beginning stages but hopes to share successes and educate the public on multiple use benefits. Example projects may include ditch maintenance, improved water delivery infrastructure, enhanced aquatic habitats.
     5. **James Dickhoff (Town of Pagosa Springs)**
        + Prominence of San Juan River throughout town parks and facilities.
        + Concerns: potable water for existing growth, water restrictions, no backup system for parks’ irrigation, water storage and more drought.
        + Value of river for park/city investments, as a community gathering place, and an enhancement to quality of life. Asked who is not present at this meeting and who should be invited ensure entire community participates.
     6. **Tim Haarmann (Banded Peak Ranch)**
        + Background: manager for 51,000-acre property with senior water rights, here to represent agricultural users.
        + Concerns: landscape scale, efficiency, downstream impacts with managing property’s land and water use.
        + Need to educate himself and community about potential collaborations and improvements to create bottom-up designs and solutions for all.
4. **Questions:**

a. What problems are occurring? What are issues we deal with now?

* Last year, area experienced first call of San Juan River ever in history, so drought a large concern. Reservoir/water storage levels are way down, and the meager snowpack isn’t refilling them like in the past. Continuing drought could lead to challenges in supplying water in the future, especially since drought was “exceptional” last year and going on for 19 years.

b. Potential for future water storage projects?

* Description of Dry Gulch reservoir proposal from John Porco (SJWCD) for off-stream reservoir. Storage size evolved from 6000 AF to 11,000 AF potential storage. Options for drought and recreation, with the hopes this project would maintain water right diversions without draining San Juan. Important to consider all options.

c. With the panel all having economic ties to water use and the impacts of higher demand, describe some of the negative impacts and how we can mitigate these in the future.

* Examples of river season cut short, bad for business/livelihood. Others saw decrease in hay production, opened new treatment facility, did not fulfill water call to keep flows instream for fish populations.

d. What are the challenges we face in conserving for more balanced usage?

* Lawn irrigation in summer. Low flows affect economy, quality of life, development, tourism, hay production. New property sales increase demand on water supply, lack of understanding on water law/priorities, property maintenance limited, invasive species spread. There is a need to educate all users on property use, limits, and mitigation. Parks & Wildlife saw reductions for entire basin, which impacted temperatures, fish spawning, fish dying, increased predation. Need plans to educate, build resiliency, and ways we can all work together for hopeful outcomes.

e. Who is missing from the conversation?

* Suggestion to involve Alvin Scheff as a county representative and the five local land trusts. Land trusts and SW Land Alliance could bring in agriculture, wildlife, and scenic values and different water user perspective.

1. **What does this effort look like? — Mely Whiting (Trout Unlimited)**

* Examples from Grand County Stream Management Plan projects, including: bank construction to reduce land loss, erosion and improve fish habitat.
* Cost-shared projects with the land owners, but can also involve community planting projects. Opportunity to tailor projects to whatever the community desires or prioritizes.

1. **How can you help?**
   * Offer input tonight, fill out a survey, and identify gaps
2. **Break out tables and conversations – Led by Steering Committee members**
   * Break-out groups split into proposed watershed segments
   * Results

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Questions & Watersheds** | **What are the issues in your watershed of interest?** | **What are the opportunities to address issues and concerns?** | **Who are the partners that need to be involved?** | **What do we not know/information do we need?** | **What is the appropriate geography for this effort?** |
| **Navajo Blanco**  (Tim & Robin) | * Lack of public access for recreation, especially in Navajo watershed * Many agricultural issues, less municipal concerns * Diversion dams directing water to “wrong” watershed w/impacts to downstream users * Inefficient irrigation systems/structures * Lawsuits * Ranches vs. McMansions * Sediment deposits & fluctuations * Aquatic habitat-temperature * Species protection-3 fish to protect, prevent federal regulation * Conservation population of native trout * Wildfire-forest density, snowpack, die off | * Funding for projects: agriculture, forestry, aquatic/fish habitat/instream * Design quality projects * Lots of partners to collect resources & involvement * Learn how B.O.R. manages water diversion schedules, hierarchies * Education * Address water right concerns/fears * Explain legislation * Improve communication, especially diversion dam changes | * County * USFS * NRCS * BOR * BLM * CPLA * Rio Grande Water Fund * San Juan Conservation District * HOA’s (Prowley Ranch, Navajo River Ranch) * Ditch Companies | * Diversion dam operations (3): schedule, regime, communication * Population increase impacts * Ranches changing to subdivisions * Land use changes * Development | Currently appropriate, but potential to expand in future. |
| **Upper San Juan**  (James & Pat) | * Instream flows * Earlier runoff/snow melt 2 weeks sooner * Warmer temperatures * Fewer gauges, money for tributary monitoring for water quality & temperatures * PAWSD lower on priority list * Access-allowing, maintaining, controlling (i.e. no fishing during high temps) * Town water restrictions for parks * Balance concerns * Education for water users: maintenance, draw, use, allocation * Dividing water rights at subdivision * Conservation by all * New water users * Maintain infrastructure & ditch invasive plants (Russian olive, willow, cottonwood) * Wildfire, forest health, ash, debris & sediment flows, disrupting irrigation | * Educate land owners on conservation & efficiency * Lake water education * Increase water fees for grass irrigation * Drought measures * Collaboration across users * Identify public access points * Educate at multiple points: restaurants, gardens, schools, drinking fountains, real estate * Town codes to enforce conservation * Infrastructure assessment/efficiency | * County * Land owners: HOAs, golf, PLPOA * Land alliances * USFS * Watershed community * Firewise | * Where is water used? | Pagosa town limits upstream |
| **Piedra**  (Becky & Mely) | * Cattle * USFS land * Use it or lose it restrictions * Drought * Juniper * Different administration * Close knit community |  | * Tribes * Snowball Ditch * Fourmile Ditch | * Future discussion? * How to irrigate? * More demand in other tributaries? * Existing protections? * Piedra Primitive Area |  |

1. **Recap and Next Steps** 
   * Tonight’s meeting will inform the groups’ future efforts and questionnaire will document needs.
   * Themes