

Stream Management Planning  
In Upper San Juan River Basin  
WSRF Grant - POGGI PDAA 201800000886

Six Month Progress Report  
February 2019

*PREPARED BY:*

Mountain Studies Institute

*SUBMITTED TO:*

Colorado Water Conservation Board

*Mountain Studies Institute (MSI), Trout Unlimited (TU), and Western Wildscapes (WW) coordinate a steering committee and stakeholder group to facilitate a community-led process to assess water needs and develop a Stream Management Plan (SMP) for the Upper San Juan River Basin. The Southwest Basin Roundtable's (SWBRT) Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) identifies a significant gap in information necessary to understand and protect environmental and recreational (E&R) water needs. This project addresses the identified information gap by tackling the first critical step in the process: community engagement, the development of a stakeholder group and a review of existing data and information.*

*Envisioned as a three-phase process, **the ultimate purpose of the proposed project is to initiate the SMP process to integrate values and seek opportunities to preserve the Upper San Juan Basin streams and their uses with wide-ranging community support and decisions based on current, relevant science and assessments.***

**Task 1 Deliverables: Create an organized stakeholder group, led by a steering committee, with structure, capacity and collective interest in pursuing a coordinated Stream Management Plan.**

- In 2018, Mountain Studies Institute (MSI), Trout Unlimited (TU), and Western Wildscapes (WW) have identified potential partners, built a steering committee, identified common interests and goals, established a process for soliciting public input (including a questionnaire and public meetings), and publicized the effort through radio shows and newspapers.
- The Steering Committee is comprised of representatives from agricultural, municipal, recreational, and environmental interests. This includes representatives from: the Park Ditch Company, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, private landowner/rancher on the Piedra River, Town of Pagosa Springs planning department, ranch manager from Banded Peak Ranch/ Chama Peak Land Alliance, Trout Unlimited, US Forest Service, Colorado Division of Water Resources, Colorado Water Conservation Board, local CSU Extension Office, Pagosa Area Water and Sanitation District, local outdoor recreation business owner, local restoration/engineering firm.
- Initial Steering Committee meetings established WEP operational ground rules, guidelines, and Code of Conduct. Next, community involvement and voluntary efforts were identified as critical components of WEP goals and objectives as well as an emphasized need to follow Colorado water laws, the objectives of Stream Management Plans in the CO Water Plan, and the use of science in developing work plans. In addition, a proposed geographical subdivision was drafted and outlined (see Attachment 3) based on hydrological sub-basin boundaries of Upper San Juan River.
- In 2018, Mountain Studies Institute (MSI), Trout Unlimited (TU), and Western Wildscapes (WW) held 6 meetings to convene a Steering Committee that facilitates the community-led process in assessing water needs and developing the Upper San Juan Stream Management Plan (SMP). While a SMP will be a significant outcome of these efforts, the Steering Committee is currently referring to this collaborative group as the Watershed Enhancement Partnership (WEP) to reflect the goals and interest of the community and demonstrate that the effort is designed to identify opportunities to address the needs of the community.
- The Steering Committee compiled similar existing efforts, both statewide and within the watershed, to coordinate with other working groups dealing with water related issues in the same geographic area, including: San Juan Headwaters Forest Health Partnership, Growing Water Smart, and Resilient Archuleta. Coordination and collaborations with these working groups helps WEP develop a list of "lessons learned" and "best practices" from other efforts.

- The WEP has also brought speakers from other SMP efforts to present on what is happening on other rivers around the state.
- A group website was established to provide resources and updates on this collective effort at <http://www.mountainstudies.org/sanjuan/smp> (See Attachment 2). This website also serves as an access point for stakeholders to complete a survey, developed from the Steering Committee meetings, on the public's water related needs and issues. Results of this survey are not currently tabulated and summarized.
- The Steering Committee organized its first public meeting on Jan. 10, 2019 to facilitate public understanding of WEP's efforts and need for stakeholder involvement. This meeting disseminated information to stakeholders regarding the WEP goals, objectives, steering committee members, SMP information, funding source, SMP project examples, and group breakout sessions.
- The public meeting breakout sessions provided critical feedback and suggestions on the geographic scope, priority issues and opportunities, what additional information to gather, and new partners to involve ensuring this process aligns with the community's needs and goals. Conversations on opportunities focused on creating collaborative, mutually-beneficial projects for all water uses, in hopes of efficiently using and conserving water resources in preparation for a drier and warmer climate (See Attachment 1). The Steering Committee will analyze this information over the coming months to further refine cooperative project progress and potential options to discuss with interested stakeholders.

**Task 2 Deliverables: Review existing data and information, to determine data gaps for subsequent assessment.**

- In developing this proposal, MSI and partners conducted an assessment of historic efforts and will continue to build off of local efforts and findings. Some of these efforts include, but are not limited to, include: the Stollsteimer Creek Watershed Master Plan (2006), Rio Blanco forest restoration efforts, San Juan National Forest Plan (Pagosa and Columbine Ranger Districts), San Juan River Protection Workgroup (2011), Town of Pagosa's efforts for river restoration, Town of Pagosa's Comprehensive Plan Revision, and Archuleta County Master Plan revision.
- Initial data gaps that have been identified include a better understanding of who owns water rights on the San Juan River and where, better flow data, stream temperature data, and potential for population growth (currently being researched by Growing Water Smart).

**Task 3 Deliverables: Develop a scope of work to assess environmental and recreation water supply needs and integrate other water supply needs as the next critical step toward a stream assessment and developing an SMP.**

- Deliverables for this task will be acquired at a later date. We are currently working to build the appropriate stakeholder involvement and community outreach.
- The group has been working to refine the geographic range for the effort with the hope of phasing in river segments once success has been demonstrated. The initial public meeting helped the stakeholder group identify river segments and the issues within those segments. This will help the steering committee identify any common themes or unique issues.

## **Challenges, Opportunities and Lessons Learned:**

### ➤ **Balancing stakeholder interests with geography**

In developing the Steering Committee, there was extensive interest in representing the spectrum of water users in the watershed. Leaders of the varied interests were contacted and brought into the conversation. These leaders represented their communities, but they also had interest in a particular geographic area. Interestingly, the overall region includes several river drainages, not all immediately associated with region identified for the Stream Management effort.

### ➤ **Identifying and incorporating appropriate partners**

The WEP had success in developing a comprehensive steering committee. We worked extensively with local community members and networks to identify appropriate representatives. Not all the community representatives identified were able to participate. Time constraints and interest in the process created some conflicts. We have been warned that we need to be conscious of peoples work schedules and needs (particularly seasonal constraints associated with agricultural needs). There is a need for the committee to actively go to the communities that they would like to be engaged in the process.

### ➤ **Maintaining clarity on process and outcomes**

The steering committee has had valuable conversations about needs, interests, and goals. In those conversations the end goal for the effort can get muddled or lost and there is a need to periodically check in on what the end goal of the effort is intended to be.

### ➤ **Trans-basin diversions**

The San Juan Watershed includes a significant diversion from the San Juan into the Chama and Rio Grande River Systems. The existence of the diversion has influenced ideas around who should be included in the conversation and when. It also brings some issues with water rights.

### ➤ **Appropriate scale**

This is one of the trickiest components to the effort. The group would ultimately like to identify actionable opportunities and there were concerns over what size watershed would be appropriate to address. Sub drainages have different issues, influences, and interests. The current thinking is, in an effort to maintain an effort that is rooted in local communities, a phased approach that includes direct conversations with residents of the sub basin would offer the greatest opportunity to move things forward.

### ➤ **Balance between community building and demonstrating progress**

This group has been brought together to help inform a stream management planning process. Relationships have been made and trust has been developing between the participants. We are now challenged to balance the need for securing appropriate information and the need of participants to feel a sense of progress that can demonstrate some action. Participants want to feel that this effort will result in on the ground work and will offer more than an opportunity for conversation.

## **ATTACHMENT 1**

# STAKEHOLDER GROUP HIGHLIGHTS

Community Values, Interests, &  
Concerns

### SCOPE/SCALE

Focus on Upper San Juan, Navajo and Blanco watersheds, but potential to expand in future.



### ISSUES



- Balancing all water uses and users on private & public lands
- Lack of education/communication on CO water law, water rights, access
- Forest & river systems health—human & biological impacts
- Drought & subsequent restrictions/priorities
- Water conservation/regulation—inefficient infrastructure, monitoring

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Funding for collaborative, multiple-use projects
- Education on water rights/laws, diversion & dam operations, conservation, access
- Improve Collaboration/Communication
- Needs Assessment/Priority Identification
- Drought Planning



### INFORMATION NEEDS



- Balancing all water uses and users on private & public lands
- Lack of education/communication on CO water law, water rights, access
- Forest & river systems health—human & biological impacts
- Drought & subsequent restrictions/priorities
- Water conservation/regulation—inefficient infrastructure, monitoring

"WE PLAN ON BEING INVOLVED IN WHAT WE ANTICIPATE TO BE A VERY OPEN AND MULTI-DISCIPLINE PROCESS THAT WILL DRIVE A BALANCED USE AND CONSERVATION OF OUR WATER RESOURCES."

BECKY HERMAN, BOARD PRESIDENT, WEMINUCHE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Read more at [mountainstudies.org/sanjuan/smp](http://mountainstudies.org/sanjuan/smp)

<b>Complete Notes from Stakeholder Group Discussion</b>					
<b>Questions &amp; Watersheds</b>	<b>What are the issues in your watershed of interest?</b>	<b>What are the opportunities to address issues and concerns?</b>	<b>Who are the partners that need to be involved?</b>	<b>What do we not know/information do we need?</b>	<b>What is the appropriate geography for this effort?</b>
<b>Navajo Blanco (Tim &amp; Robin)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of public access for recreation, especially in Navajo watershed</li> <li>• Many agricultural issues, less municipal concerns</li> <li>• Diversion dams directing water to “wrong” watershed w/impacts to downstream users</li> <li>• Inefficient irrigation systems/structures</li> <li>• Lawsuits</li> <li>• Ranches vs. McMansions</li> <li>• Sediment deposits &amp; fluctuations</li> <li>• Aquatic habitat-temperature</li> <li>• Species protection-3 fish to protect, prevent federal regulation</li> <li>• Conservation population of native trout</li> <li>• Wildfire-forest density, snowpack, die off</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding for projects: agriculture, forestry, aquatic/fish habitat/instream</li> <li>• Design quality projects</li> <li>• Lots of partners to collect resources &amp; involvement</li> <li>• Learn how B.O.R. manages water diversion schedules, hierarchies</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Address water right concerns/fears</li> <li>• Explain legislation</li> <li>• Improve communication, especially diversion dam changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County</li> <li>• USFS</li> <li>• NRCS</li> <li>• BOR</li> <li>• BLM</li> <li>• CPLA</li> <li>• Rio Grande Water Fund</li> <li>• San Juan Conservation District</li> <li>• HOA’s (Prowley Ranch, Navajo River Ranch)</li> <li>• Ditch Companies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversion dam operations (3): schedule, regime, communication</li> <li>• Population increase impacts</li> <li>• Ranches changing to subdivisions</li> <li>• Land use changes</li> <li>• Development</li> </ul>	<p>Currently appropriate, but potential to expand in future.</p>
<b>Upper San Juan (James &amp; Pat)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instream flows</li> <li>• Earlier runoff/snow melt 2 weeks sooner</li> <li>• Warmer temperatures</li> <li>• Fewer gauges, money for tributary monitoring for water quality &amp; temperatures</li> <li>• PAWSD lower on priority list</li> <li>• Access-allowing, maintaining, controlling (i.e. no fishing during high temps)</li> <li>• Town water restrictions for parks</li> <li>• Balance concerns</li> <li>• Education for water users: maintenance, draw, use, allocation</li> <li>• Dividing water rights at subdivision</li> <li>• Conservation by all</li> <li>• New water users</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate land owners on conservation &amp; efficiency</li> <li>• Lake water education</li> <li>• Increase water fees for grass irrigation</li> <li>• Drought measures</li> <li>• Collaboration across users</li> <li>• Identify public access points</li> <li>• Educate at multiple points: restaurants, gardens, schools, drinking fountains, real estate</li> <li>• Town codes to enforce conservation</li> <li>• Infrastructure assessment/efficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County</li> <li>• Land owners: HOAs, golf, PLPOA</li> <li>• Land alliances</li> <li>• USFS</li> <li>• Watershed community</li> <li>• Firewise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where is water used?</li> </ul>	<p>Pagosa town limits upstream</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Maintain infrastructure &amp; ditch invasive plants (Russian olive, willow, cottonwood)</li> <li>•Wildfire, forest health, ash, debris &amp; sediment flows, disrupting irrigation</li> <li>•Impacts of recreational activities on aquatic ecology/fisheries</li> </ul>				
<b>Piedra</b> (Becky & Mely)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Cattle</li> <li>•USFS land</li> <li>•Use it or lose it restrictions</li> <li>•Drought</li> <li>•Juniper</li> <li>•Different administration</li> <li>•Close knit community</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tribes</li> <li>• Snowball Ditch</li> <li>• Fourmile Ditch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Future discussion?</li> <li>•How to irrigate?</li> <li>•More demand in other tributaries?</li> <li>•Existing protections?</li> <li>•Piedra Primitive Area</li> </ul>	

## **ATTACHMENT 2**

Collaborative Group Website: <http://www.mountainstudies.org/sanjuan/smp>

# UPPER SAN JUAN WATERSHED ENHANCEMENT PARTNERSHIP



**WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION  
ON VALUES AND CONCERNS ABOUT THE SAN JUAN  
WATERSHED. PLEASE READ THIS LETTER BEFORE  
PROCEEDING.**

### GUIDING DOCUMENTS

- [Stream Management Plan Concept, Phases II & III](#)
- [Proposed Schedule, Phase I](#)
- [MSI Scope of Work](#)

### MEETING NOTES

- [June 5, 2018](#)
- [July 13, 2018](#)
- [August 10, 2018](#)
- [January 10, 2019](#)

### OTHER PLANS

- [Colorado River Basin Integrated Water Management Planning \(2018\)](#)
- [Eagle River Community Water Plan](#)
- [San Juan River Historical Ecology Assessment \(2015\)](#)



## ATTACHMENT 3

### Evolution of Geographic Scope/Map:









