

**Community Agriculture Alliance  
IWMP Stakeholder Meetings Report**

**October 2018**

**I. Meeting Goals**

- Assess interest level to be involved with IWMP
- Gain feedback on IWMP priority issues
- Identify sub-basin coordinator prospects

**II. Methodology**

CAA held small group meetings in Phippsburg, Hayden, Clark, Steamboat, Craig and Maybell. Meeting attendance was limited to 15 participants (exception of Craig meeting, 27 participants) to allow for full participation and discussion. Meetings were held 6-8pm with dinner served. CAA staff provided meeting facilitation and discussion on IWMP related questions. Division of Water Resource staff, including Division Engineer Erin Light, joined meetings after an hour. DOWR and CAA led discussion on value of water rights, related maintenance and questions. Questions asked during the meetings are included in Attachment 1.

**III. Key Themes**

- There is a positive reception to involvement with the IWMP, but significant mistrust of government and water organizations exists. Building trust and a willingness to work together on common goals must be an important goal of the IWMP.
- Involvement of water users will require an individual approach on terms that work for their schedules. Significant time will need to be dedicated to ensuring their involvement in the IWMP.
- Ag producers see a lot of discussion on water related projects but little or no action. Identifying smaller, easily accomplished while successful and impactful projects will aid in building trust and lay the groundwork for larger, more complicated projects. The large need for diversion upgrades is one such project idea.
- Irrigators would like to see education for recreation interests so they better understand the importance of private property rights and the value of agriculture to current river hydrology, the ecological state of the river and the economic impact and tourist value of Routt County's working landscape.
- Hands-on assistance with measuring devices and headgate maintenance, coupled with education on water rights administration, "use it or lose it", and how to minimize water waste and irrigation practices that benefit overall river health is of interest.

**IV. Meeting Summaries**

**1. Yampa Headwaters – Flat Tops to Stagecoach**

Education and Outreach

- Common understanding that what they do has both local (neighbor) and broader impact on entire river system. Long time ranchers help educate new ag producers, ranch managers and 2<sup>nd</sup> home owners.

- Distrust of government, unwanted intervention and funding that could have different or a wide range of interests and possible influence. IWMP needs to address trust building and “one person at a time” approach to listening and engagement.
- Concerns and distrust of UYWCD, specific questions about Morrison Creek projects. UYWCD is negatively perceived and needs to work on building trust around common goals with agriculture.
- Acknowledge importance for some ag producers with fishing/recreation programs “If it weren’t for fishing, we couldn’t ranch”. Possible education on benefits and successful structure of similar programs that have economic benefit for ag.
- Education for recreation, conservationists, 2<sup>nd</sup> home owners on importance and benefits of agriculture irrigation (specific example given of head gate being blocked with logs to try and stop water in ditch, lack of understanding importance of agriculture and water rights)
- Education for agriculture on different diversion structures (tour examples of fish structures on Snake River) and funding available for structure projects

#### IWMP Needs Assessment/Research

- Concern over low flow and river dry up (Bear River and tributaries) and impacts to fish, wildlife, ecology, water temp and overall riparian zone; could this be avoided with more flexible policy and cooperation. Education and cooperation on river/fish health projects. Improved communication with Division of Wildlife and other organizations, on how they can work together to keep river flowing and healthy fish population. Advocacy for common sense approach vs rigid statewide policy that does not fit all areas/situations
- Concerns about cost of water and ability of agriculture to afford reservoir water in the future and stay in production agriculture. Data and information on cost of water, and tools to help agriculture make economic decisions.
- Support additional storage depending on water right used and intended purpose (ag included). Ag involvement in assessment and research work to build cooperation and buy in.

#### Projects

- Feeling there have been many meetings with poor representation of South Routt agriculture and little or no action that is beneficial to ag. IWMP needs to address this and help create opportunities for “low hanging fruit” type projects that can build good will, trust and interest in further cooperation/involvement.
- Every diversion could use some repair and/or upgrade both privately and critical repairs at Stillwater Reservoir.

#### Sub-Basin Coordination and Leadership

- South Routt community members feel they work well with one another and neighbors communicate. This is a strength to build upon for IWMP coordination. It is important to ask for their help in communicating with one another and that the sub-coordinator be someone from the area (not an outsider).
- They understand importance of accurate records and historical information. There is an opportunity for IWMP to gain historical information from long time ranchers in area.

- No identified Sub-Basin Coordinator (Andy Shaffner was suggested, but she was in attendance and declined)

#### Summary

- Scale of Interest for IWMP involvement - 1 (not interested at all) to 5 (eager to participate) = 3

## 2. Yampa Mainstem – Stagecoach to Elkhead Creek

#### Education and Outreach

- Concerns and misunderstanding of water conservation vs use it or lose it concept that is felt to encourage wasteful use. Education programs and support for one-on-one meetings to improve understanding of current system
- Need to keep water for livestock (augmentation possibilities). Education for ag on augmentation options and current programs.
- Frustration with littering from recreation users. Outreach, education and signage for rec users. Education and communication with recreation users on health of river, trash and impact
- IWMP must respect private property rights and focus on keeping water in Yampa Basin, not sending it downstream to CA or NV. Apprehension and distrust that outside groups offer money and want influence. Open communication and information sharing will help reduce this perception.
- Low water flows potential change in irrigation practices, “river has lost its ability to flood in my reach”, future plans to mitigate this would utilize pumps. Education and information on dealing with low flows, options and resources.
- Concerns that long ditches are not efficient due to water loss, gated pipe more efficient but costly; cost of pumps also an issue that it does not make economic sense with hay prices, how to stay in production agriculture and maintain irrigation? Information and resources on cost benefit analysis.
- Education for ag water users on head gate installation, maintenance and use.
- Interest in education on alternative dam methods (instead of push up or gravel dams)

#### IWMP Needs Assessment/Research

- Interest in improved head gates for more efficiency
- Interested in learning about more water storage options, ex Morrison Creek, or smaller storage in a variety of geographic areas to help capture high flows when available for agriculture and projects that benefit overall river health.
- Utilize technology to enter water records and communicate with DOWR, if developed would need training on this.
- Concern about wildfire impact, heavy rain or spring runoff can negatively affect water quality, silt and ash may impact municipal and irrigation systems. Learn from other communities and develop proactive plans for Routt National Forest. Study and implement check dams in the National Forest to minimize negative impacts on water quality.
- Questions about push up dams in the river and their effect on river health, interest in alternatives that are “fish friendly” and maintain river health.

## Projects

- Signage for when the river is too low to float, improved communication with rec users at rental shops (fishing, tubing, rafting, paddleboard, etc). Possible training for guides and rental shop employees.
- Repair for Stillwater Reservoir

## Sub-Basin Coordination and Leadership

- Limited communication among neighbors and even within ditches, facilitator would be helpful. Frustration with DOWR lack of communication (“no call, no text. Just an orange note on headgate saying we were shut off”)
- No recommendations for Sub Basin Coordinator but feel it would be a great position to have filled; lots of ideas of what they could do.

## Summary

- Scale of Interest for IWMP involvement - 1 (not interested at all) to 5 (eager to participate) = 2.5

### 3. **Yampa Mainstem – Elkhead Creek to Deerlodge**

#### Education and Outreach

- Beavers are negatively impacting irrigation ditches and flows. Education on how to mitigate and manage without negative impact.
- Concerns that agriculture may be at odds with environmentalists and the “wild and scenic” image of the Yampa . Outreach and relationship building with environmental groups.
- View a broader, whole system approach as important (several ranchers in Maybell area also have property on other part of the Yampa/tributaries and see need for bigger picture) Be aware of this when focusing on specific sub-basin issues, it is important to communicate with all ag producers equally.
- Be aware of salinity and selenium water quality in the Yampa Basin (concerns coming from issues in other parts of Colorado). While not a current issue, consider education and information sharing on current standards and management strategies.
- Questions on water quality monitoring in the area, education opportunity; and concerns that agriculture will be blamed for negative impacts when it may be industrial cause.
- Timing for irrigation is critical, some tributaries of the lower Yampa go dry quickly in spring (Milk Creek, Williams Fork); education on what happens to their water right if creek is dry.
- Education for recreation users on importance of agriculture and private property rights.
- Education for ag water users on tailwater use, legality and overall river health.

#### IWMP Needs Assessment/Research

- Additional storage is important to consider, concerns that water will go to Front Range and or CA, NV; ensure that storage is available and affordable for ag. Comments that “water will flow to the most voters and money, rather than to those with senior rights involved with production agriculture”. Ag needs to be a part of storage projects and information shared so there is increased trust that water will be available for agriculture in our area.
- Recognition of importance of fish recovery program but strong concerns over management practices, seeking holistic approach that involves community (Question if it would be better for

the native fish to have low flows since that is how they survived in the past and the non-native would not survive the low flows). Improved communication and education on fish program so ag producers can understand their role and goals of programs.

- Concerns about forest management and forest fires having a negative impact on water quality. Education and studies on impact, prevention and recovery plans.
- IWMP should include management and control of nonnative species (both plants and wildlife). Education for agriculture on what/why/how and management plans.
- Study and/or education on impact of irrigation systems (flood vs sprinkler). Ag producers acknowledge critical importance of up river flood irrigation for late stream flows but are concerned there is pressure to change for sake of efficiency and what negative impacts could happen to entire river system. "Need science to back this up."

#### Projects

- Opportunity for irrigation structure improvement, most are aging and inefficient. Include education on options, costs, assistance, installation and maintenance.
- Upgrading Maybell Ditch diversion to recreation/fish/ag friendly structure. Focus on multiple beneficial uses and partnerships.
- Research, study and educate about ag water storage projects at Milk Creek and Black Mountain
- Erosion control on Elk Head Reservoir, major concerns on impacts and inefficiency.

#### Sub-Basin Coordination and Leadership

- Distrust of outside organizations, specifically environmental groups, and fear that what starts out as cooperative projects will have increasing environmental stipulations and restrictions. Trust building, and cooperation is critical to project success.
- Sub basin coordinator recommendations – Mike Camblin and Frank Stetson

#### Summary

- Scale of Interest for IWMP involvement - 1 (not interested at all) to 5 (eager to participate) = 3.25

#### 4. Elk River and Tributaries

##### Education and Outreach

- Limited interest on additional water storage, noted past studies and no action that impacts agriculture, "snow pack is our storage". Concerns about additional storage creating congestion of rec users and exorbitant costs. Consider outreach and including in education efforts on other basin storage projects.
- Irrigation is different, land has been subdivided creating narrow meadows that are not conducive to sprinklers and ditch maintenance is challenging. Education on irrigation options and technology use.
- Soil needs fall irrigation to help establish hay for next year. Education and information on soil health impact and irrigation practices.
- Visitors want to see the green valley, what is "value of the view" and impact on ag water use. This is a much broader issue that needs to be discussed further with ag producers in general.

- Private leasing for rec/fishing has positive economic impact and managed privately. Shared information from those who have successful programs with others who might want to consider.
- See themselves as part of water basin and their role is to use water efficiently and “conserve as much water as possible”. Education on water use, legal implications and conservation.

#### IWMP Needs Assessment/Research

- How to balance river health/use and ranching stability is critical challenge while protecting overall river health/system. Science, data and information on impacts.

#### Projects

- Need strategies for agriculture going forward for the increased dry weather pattern, short and long term. This includes education, outreach and storage projects that will positively impact entire river system, not just Elk River area.
- Education for recreation users on their impacts and the importance of agriculture.

#### Sub-Basin Coordination and Leadership

- “We are busy and do not have the time to work on water issues” but recognize critical importance of someone to coordinate.
- No recommendations for Sub Basin Coordinator

#### Summary

- Scale of Interest for IWMP involvement - 1 (not interested at all) to 5 (eager to participate) = 2
- Note: limited participation at meeting, additional stakeholder input needed

### V. CAA Summary and Key Recommendations

Overall there is a positive reception to the idea of involvement with the IWMP, with some areas more interested in specific projects than others. Ag water users understand that they need to be involved and be a part of the plan, not just heard or represented, but an active participant. This is a significant challenge, as being involved or active means something different to each person. The best strategy to move forward on this is improved communication (website, email, phone calls, group and individual meetings) and an understanding that one method will not reach everyone. While ag producers recognize the importance of working on a broader plan and river related projects, there is significant mistrust of government and water organizations but an open attitude and willingness to work together on common goals. Building trust, one person at a time, will be the first step in any successful plan/project. Project coordinators and partnering organizations must be willing to develop relationships with ag water users. It is important to meet them in their communities, being cognizant of the time of day/year that works for ag producers. Listening, building trust, respect and an equal partnership is a critical first step. Improved coordination and communication would benefit all water users.

A related, but often conflicting statement, was “meeting and study fatigue”. Ag producers feel there has been a lot of discussion on water related projects but little or no action. They expressed an interest in making decisions and taking action, especially on ag water storage projects. Identifying projects that are “low hanging fruit”, smaller, easily accomplished while successful and impactful will aid in building trust

and lay the groundwork for larger, more complicated projects. One ag producer explained their concerns by stating, “Storage is only beneficial to agriculture if the water is earmarked for irrigation use and that use must be protected long term. The Upper Yampa Conservancy District, the gov't entity that would build storage projects, does not want to build irrigation projects because they don't pay enough. They also want to replace the current irrigation storage water at the head of the river with the more lucrative uses of municipal, industrial or augmentation. This potentially harms agriculture and is a clear indication of what uses Upper Yampa would want any new storage to be earmarked for. In addition, there is a limited demand for irrigation water below Stagecoach.”

Ag producers expressed a clear desire to protect and respect private property including river/water access. There is a strong perception that recreation (fishing, tubing, rafting) does not understand or value the importance of agriculture. There is an opportunity to build partnerships and education programs with recreation organizations.

There are also opportunities for additional education programs for ag water users. There are questions and ambiguity about water rights and responsibilities. Resources and assistance with measuring devices and headgate maintenance were also mentioned multiple times. There is confusion and frustration on “use it or lose it” concept. Many ag water users have misconceptions about losing their water rights if they don't use the full amount. In many situations they could use less water than their full water right, but the current system does not allow for this or provide an incentive to conserve water. Additionally, education programs on how to minimize water waste and irrigation practices that benefit overall river health would be of interest. Starting with education and information, helping build positive relationships with Division of Water Resource staff and working towards common sense solutions to aid the entire river system will take time but ag producers understand the critical role they play in the basin. One producer summarized this by explaining, “My role is to work as an active environmentalist rather than an environmental activist. To reasonably advocate for agricultural water use, to protect production agriculture and help preserve the river habitat for the diminishing wildlife populations along the river corridor.”

In 2006 CSU Extension completed a study called “The Value of the View” that measured the economic impact and tourist value of Routt County's working landscape. The challenge remains how to create a connection between visitors/2<sup>nd</sup> home owners/new residents who come to the Valley for its beauty and heritage, with local independent agriculture. Building understanding and awareness that agriculture is the foundation of water management and current ecological state of the river would be beneficial for all. Identifying programs and strategies that preserve open agriculture land while supporting a healthy river system is a critical consideration. If ag producers go out of business the entire community stands to lose economically, environmentally and the connection to our authentic agriculture heritage.

While the meetings did not identify sub basin coordinators, there is interest in having this position in the communities. Once specific projects are identified, CAA would be available to help recruit sub basin coordinators from the agriculture community and most likely have a greater success of filling the positions with a targeted project and direct ask.

Municipalities were not interviewed due to time constraints. An online survey was sent but there were no respondents at time of report. Additional outreach is needed for municipalities in Oak Creek, Yampa, Hayden and Craig.

## **Attachment 1: Questions Asked During Stakeholder Meetings**

### **IWMP Questions**

- Please give us an overview of your irrigation system from a historical perspective, current practices and changes or improvements for the future.
- What issues do you have with your irrigation system?
- What is your understanding of how the watershed works? What do you see as your role within the watershed?
- What could be done to improve irrigation infrastructure in the watershed?
- What is your interest and/or input on upgrading infrastructure?
- What are your thoughts on current or new water storage projects?
- Do you have concerns about river access or recreation projects?
- Do you think endangered fish recovery is a critical issue?
- Do you have recommendations for projects or actions that could help improve water use and/or water quality?
- Do you think we can work together, as a bigger system, on watershed issues? Are you willing to be a part of that process? How?
- What is your willingness to work in connection to other groups on watershed projects? Ex environmental groups, government, industry, municipalities
- What would you want to see in the IWMP? What should not be included?
- Who would be recommended to help coordinate IWMP in this area/sub basin?

### **DWR Questions**

- In your minds, what do you believe to be the value of your Water right?
- What would happen to your ranch/farm if you had no water?
- What investments do you make annually to assure water is available for application and use? Labor, time or monetary
- Do you have an operable headgate? Do you have an operable measuring device? If yes to either a headgate or measuring device, what maintenance do you perform each year on these devices to assure they are operable?
- How is the ditch managed, part of company or individual owners? Does this pose any constraints on your ability to maintain the ditch?
- In closing, take a moment to consider what is the most valuable asset on you ranch/ what is the one thing you absolutely have to have in order for your ranch to operate? If the answer is “water” take some time to think about what you can do to assure this asset and its value is properly protected.