

**St. Vrain and Left Hand Creeks – Stream Management Plan Discussion
Stakeholder Interview Summary
September 22, 2017**

Expertise in the group includes the following technical skills:

- Water resources management, hydrology
- Water treatment, water quality
- Engineering, excavation
- Watershed science, environmental science, ecology, stream restoration
- Environmental planning
- Collaboration, coalition building, community outreach
- Politics, policy, and experience navigating the water system in Colorado
- Proposal writing

Reasons people are involved in this discussion about a stream management plan include:

- Inventorying issues and opportunities on St. Vrain and/or Left Hand Creek
- Ensuring sufficient flows to achieve interests (ag, recreation, environmental, etc.)
- Ensuring that any new projects or efforts are consistent with existing water rights, existing management plans, etc.
- Being responsive to and leveraging an apparent interest at CWCB in seeing something happen on these creeks

Flow-related challenges or opportunities on St. Vrain and Left Hand Creeks include:

- Getting constructive communication to occur between those who want to see more water in the river and those who want to see more water on crops
- Bringing together consumptive and nonconsumptive uses and users
- Requests for instream flows in a water-short environment
- Addressing segments of Left Hand and St. Vrain Creeks that dry up in the winter
- Restoring or mimicking the natural hydrology as much as/where possible
- Working with and within existing water availability, decrees, and water law
- Identifying and prioritizing projects
- Finding projects to help with flood recovery while also meeting other goals
- Maintaining aquatic habitat, agriculture, and other water users by helping ensure that the water that people want and need is available when and where it is needed
- Promoting stewardship and ecology practices
- Developing trails and other recreational opportunities in the area
- Developing alternative strategies to go beyond what we have already tried
- Clarifying what flows (types, amounts) we want to manage toward
- Taking advantage of the fact that there are fewer water rights battles on these creeks than there are on surrounding rivers; now is a good time to work on this

The potential value that people see of having a stream management plan includes:

- Establishing some long-term goals that various stakeholders can work on together
- Prioritizing where we can make the biggest impact
- Building rapport and collaborative working relationships among stakeholder groups
- Identifying projects to improve water quality, decrease sediment loading, and manage flows
- Balancing historic agricultural water uses with proposals for instream flows to support ecological and recreational values
- Increasing efficiency of water use to achieve multiple goals
- Cataloging conditions on the creeks
- Identifying the critical issues in the watershed

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- Identifying needs for water and options for how to meet those needs
- Improving collaboration in the watershed
- Quantifying nonconsumptive uses on these creeks
- Developing long-term strategies to protect water quality and flows
- Examining lots of options and tradeoffs
- Creating a legacy document that anchors other efforts going forward
- *Note: A small number of respondents said they did not know what the value of having stream management plan would be. One person wondered if the plan was a step in achieving another, unstated goal.*

Thoughts on the best scale for a stream management plan:

- ***The whole watershed or both creeks***
 - The group should look at St. Vrain and Left Hand Creeks as an integrated system; strategies may not overlap, but if/where there are commonalities, the group should take advantage of those.
 - A comprehensive approach is the only way to understand the whole system and find the best places to make the biggest impact. The study should be the whole watershed, followed by a prioritization of projects.
 - The group should do the largest scale possible but be realistic based on funding and impact.
- ***Some reaches, one or the other creek***
 - St. Vrain and Left Hand Creeks are very different and have different issues; including them in the same plan would make the plan too large and make stakeholder engagement unwieldy.
 - The group could focus on St. Vrain Creek from Lyons to I-25; this would help the streams and also support the state park.
 - The group should separate the headwaters from the lower reaches, since there are more uses and more challenges in the lower reaches than in the headwaters.
 - The group could focus on the stretch of Left Hand between Lyons and Longmont.
 - The group could do different reaches with different land ownership—focus on one reach with predominantly public ownership and one reach with predominantly private ownership.
- ***Phasing***
 - The group should pursue a phased approach. First, look at the entire watershed. Then, based on the data, identify 3 or 4 focus area where there is the opportunity to be most effective and have the biggest impact.
 - Start with a focus on gathering and analyzing data that is already available and assess where there are data gaps, then focus on whichever reach has the *least costly and time consuming gaps to fill and apply a framework for planning and analysis (like grading, or other tool)*.
- ***Other***
 - Focusing where consumptive and nonconsumptive uses overlap will bring the most benefit.
 - The group should either go really small and focus on a reach of Left Hand Creek, or go big and do a watershed-level plan that gives the full picture.
 - This should maybe be an open question at the front end until there is more data and information.

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Concerns about pursuing a stream management plan include:

- Raising expectations and then having the effort peter out because it is too much work or because some stakeholders were not really bought in
- Getting everyone to agree on what we want to manage toward, on the extent and scope of the plan
- Getting to an outcome that some in the group decide they can't support, even if they were ok with the process to get there
- Getting to strategies that affect current water rights (e.g., new instream flow filings)
- Staffing and energy concerns—folks are still working on flood recovery through 2018
- Creating or exacerbating contentiousness among stakeholders or with the public
- Being blocked by State regulations and FEMA rules
- Focusing only on instream flows without exploring other management options like gates, storage, structures, water banking, efficiency, ditch lining, etc.
- Having some stakeholders dominate the discussion and leaving others out
- Working hard on a plan so it can sit on a shelf
- Investing time at the front end and then having the focus shift to something that is not relevant to some stakeholders, who would then lose the time and energy they invested
- Overlooking some important part of the scope or underestimating the cost and failing to set the plan up for success
- Relying too heavily on one person or one entity to complete the plan; failing to make it truly a collaborative effort

Things people liked in the Crystal River Stream Management Plan:

- The variety of strategies (market-based incentives, leasing relationships, conservation, legal options, structural improvements, etc.)
- Habitat enhancements and modifications
- Identification of management priorities
- Short-term and long-term strategies
- Assessments and data collection to get to alternatives
- Combination of science and public/stakeholder input
- The focus areas—started broad then funneled down
- That pie chart with the strategy categories
- Inclusion of both consumptive and nonconsumptive uses
- The GIS analysis and different kind of mapping, showing issue areas
- The assessment of the effectiveness of the strategy options

Things people thought were missing from the Crystal River Stream Management Plan:

- How to pull it all together. That's a lot of strategies that will require a lot of partner engagement to achieve.
- Details on funding: how much did that plan cost? How much was compromised to complete it within budget?
- The Gunnison plan specified their partners and their role in implementation.
- The Poudre plan grades (A, B, C, etc.) different stream reaches. That could be useful.

Perspectives on how to achieve the 50% match included:

- Some partners may have money to contribute. No one indicated they could or would cover all of the match, but many indicated an ability to contribute something.

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- A few stated that cash contributions may be more difficult for entities whose financial resources come from assessments on private individuals.
- Some thought that the larger water users on the creeks should contribute something.
- Several people indicated that their organizations could contribute in-kind assistance through education, outreach, analysis, project management, etc.
- Other ideas included holding fundraising events and pursuing other grants for the match

How people want to contribute to the proposal writing:

- Several people indicated a willing to help write the proposal.
- Others indicated that they would like to review it to ensure that it addresses key issues: water quality, impacts to existing water rights, an ongoing role for partners in the plan, etc.
- A few said they don't know enough to be able to say whether/how they could help.
- A few said they would need to see a final version before it is submitted to ensure that their organization/agency could support it.

How people want to contribute if the grant is awarded:

- Some can help with analysis and data gathering.
- Some offered to help with education and outreach to the public, to their members, and/or to other stakeholders.
- Some said that they have experience writing these types of plans and could help that way.
- Some said they would focus on project implementation once the plan is complete.
- Some said they are not yet sure what their role would or could be in the development of the plan.

Thought on whether getting the proposal done by November 3rd is achievable:

- Most people said yes, either because they personally have experience doing this type of work on a short timeframe or because they believe others have the motivation and energy to get it done.
- A few expressed skepticism that it could be done in the time available. They indicated that there is not enough information at this time to write a competitive proposal and/or that everyone has full-time jobs and cannot dedicate enough time to get it done.
- One person noted that if the group cannot get a proposal together for 2017, it would be wise to start working now to prepare a proposal for 2018.

Additional things on people's minds about this included:

- It would be good for the group to have a better view of what a stream management plan could potentially include and then address this whole idea of collaboration and cooperation vs. the fear of committing an organization to something they cannot support.
- A major concern is the protection of water rights and making sure there is the highest quality water possible available.
- Ditch companies and water rights holders may not currently have a strong incentive to participate. Perhaps the group should explore ways to make this meaningful to them.
- People have been working together since the flood, so there's some collaborative history there.
- The development of the scope of work must be a collaborative process.

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- It's an exciting time. Several people are coalescing around this. CWCB wants to see something happen in this watershed, and there is great leadership and lots of stakeholder interest.
- It is imperative that the group discuss and commit to addressing the "hard issues," otherwise the plan will be meaningless.

Interview Conclusions: Yes IF

- 1. *There is interest among partners to pursue a stream management plan, IF:***
 - a. Concerns about potential impacts to existing water rights can be addressed prior to developing a proposal.
 - b. There are some protections to ensure that no person, agency, or organization is obligated to support the outcome if it undermines their interests.
 - c. The group can reach an agreement on the scale of the stream management plan.
- 2. *There are sufficient partners willing to help write and review the proposal. If the group can find agreement on the issues above, it is likely the proposal can be prepared and submitted on time.***
- 3. *There are enough partners willing to contribute both cash and in-kind match that the 50% match requirement can likely be met.***