

## NOTES



# Understanding How Watershed, Forest, and Other Planning Initiatives Come Together

## Watershed Planning Peer Learning Call

April 25th, 2024, 10:00 – 11:30am MDT

[Watch the recording](#)

### **Introduction**

Join River Network and Strategic by Nature to learn about how the myriad planning opportunities for watersheds come together. Through a guided presentation, small group discussions, and examples shared by watershed planning leads, we will highlight examples of communities throughout Colorado who are integrating watershed, forest, and other planning efforts to achieve desired outcomes for their communities.

### **Anticipated Outcomes**

Advance knowledge around stakeholder and community engagement by:

- Learning from your peers.
- Becoming familiar with different types of planning processes that complement stream/integrated water management planning.
- Problem solve how to best integrate these planning efforts based on your community goals.
- Advancing relationships with SMP peers through interactive, small-group discussions.

### **Peer Discussion/Breakout Group Notes**

Break out groups focused on three different questions and were guided through the following sub-questions:

- What questions do you have for the breakout group lead (5 min)?
- Do you have an existing watershed assessment?
- What have you identified as your watershed needs (e.g., do you need to develop a flow recommendation, WRAP, etc.)

### **Breakout group 1: Our community has multiple plans, how do we integrate them?**

- Where does CWCB see challenges with integrating different plans and planning in general?
  - Groups have planning fatigue and are struggling with capacity and project implementation. When new plans are introduced, groups lack capacity and funding.
  - There is also complexity with the diversity of stakeholder groups - fire districts, federal lands, private lands, riverscapes, etc., in bringing priorities into one prioritization list - some people feel their priorities end up lower on the list. CWCB is leaning away from strict prioritization, remaining flexible with priorities and opportunities. CWCB does not need groups to provide a prioritized list but they do want a list of action items including cost estimates. Suggests recognizing everyone's priorities and then working

to tie together high priority and low priority projects to be opportunistic in getting work done.

- Also, there are multiple project types - roads, bridges, natural infrastructure, forestry treatments, etc. This is overwhelming for people.
- Further, there are so many different types of contractors. Groups are worried about not understanding different needs and skills like logging.
- The whole group doesn't have to own every project. Let the appropriate group take ownership.
- Consider including good facilitation so stakeholders feel heard and included.
- How can we tie the different plans together, especially with all the different voices/interest holders?
  - Use GIS to coalesce different plans and maps.
  - Figure out different plans that exist, and fill in the gaps. Plan to plan, which can be hard, and interface with the public.
  - Stay engaged with the different planning efforts. The best person in the room to get the planning done is you. This effort is not always going to get everyone to talk or have perfect choreography. But just keep moving. If groups consider hiring a consultant, be sure they bring detail and specificity and if not, it may just be better to do it yourself.
  - River Network signed a MOU with Central Conservancy, and brought capacity to look at different parts and pieces and provide a roadmap, but not necessarily specificity. Can't make a fully integrated plan. Planning needs a project description. Provide enough information for the partnership to move forward. If you have something, keep moving forward with that.
- What are suggestions and ideas for implementing plans?
  - Implementation of plans can be easy or difficult depending on how stakeholders are set up.
  - Sometimes groups can experience paralysis by analysis, making it hard to define what priorities are and have a hard time knowing where to start. Rather than doing another new plan, try identifying priority locations and projects to help move things forward.
  - Important to have a practical discussion with your stakeholder group about implementation. Work with subject-matter experts to analyze and research appropriate locations for Low Tech Process-Based Restoration (LTPBR). For example, use data layers to overlap fuelscape work with LTPBR work, which can help pinpoint areas for project implementation. This also helps to leverage funds, which helps make financial sense.
- Suggestions, questions
  - Consider having a statewide index to visit and understand the guts of models. Clear list of how each component is ranked, clear descriptions of how models were developed.
  - How does a Regional Partnership Initiative (RPI) to manage wildlife for recreation and climate change work with an IWMP? It is different planning but related. What resources are available?.

## **Breakout group 2: We already have one plan, how do we know whether another type of plan is good for us?**

- Has the Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed (CPRW) looked at the CWCB Wildfire Ready Action Plan (WRAP) template relative to your resilience plan - any gaps?
  - CPRW picked highest priority watersheds for detailed WRAP components such as susceptibility analysis.
  - Did you build a hydrological model? That is one of the most critical pieces of WRAP. Come to CWCB for funding to do that. Rainfall/runoff model, not empirical model (derails recovery processes, antiquated, doesn't route flows).
  - CPRW is working on an application for a planning portion of WRAP and we will include H+H modeling.
  - Chris will put on map of existing WRAPs as Poudre is currently a data gap.
- Can you describe riverscape planning efforts in more detail?
  - CPRW doesn't have a specific riverscape plan. We just kicked off another effort that will be guiding riverscape work called Poudre Pearls, which includes active stream corridor mapping. This effort helps to identify areas on landscape to enhance before fire, and will guide where wet meadow restoration will happen. The term riverscape plan is quite broad, it depends on what your area needs. CPRW is trying to combine priority areas to treat in uplands/forest with river work, for example using trees that are being harvested as part of a restoration project, or enhancing the stream corridor in an area where upland work is warranted but the topography is prohibitive.
  - Riverscape planning is kind of a catch all term in the context of Andrea's slides.
- Do you have any advice on reviewing the loads of data and literature and previous studies in the watershed and incorporating them into your existing efforts?
  - There is so much data and so much going on in the watershed. Efforts in the City of Greeley, City of Fort Collins, Northern Water, internal planning, upper watershed has Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). We didn't incorporate the data in some of these cases but increased the weighting of that area. Hard question to answer because all the data and previous efforts can be overwhelming.
- Will CPRW's River Health Assessment Framework (RHAF) have a list of priority projects?
  - No, just methodology and planning effort. Hoping Northern Water will use it, adapting it to meet their needs such as recreation. Our next steps are to implement the RHAF again. Funding requested in the City/Middle section, but we want to put all three sections on the same timeframe - 2025. New baseline. Then use data to develop a project list. Using it for monitoring.
- Can RHAF be used in other watersheds?
  - Yes, initial Poudre RHAF was worked on by Brad Johnson (Johnson Environmental Consulting) who adapted it from the Functional Assessment of Colorado Wetlands (FACWet). CWCB and their Technical Assistance team are working on turning CORHAF (Colorado RHAF) into a guidance document that includes background information on indicators/metrics/data sources and accompanying worksheets for the entire state.
- How does CORHAF compare to the Colorado Stream Quantification Tool (SQT)?
  - SQT is more regulatory and used for mitigation banking. Use similar data but different goals/purpose.
- How do you use your RHAF and plans?

- The intent is never to let plans sit on a shelf - CPRW constantly looks at them to guide the work we do and grants we are seeking, we implement the projects identified in them. RHAF is a different scale and is used to get a baseline of existing conditions and used for monitoring and adaptive management.

**Breakout group 3: We don't have a plan, how do we know what is the best plan/assessment for our community?**

- Building trust with interest holders (stakeholders) takes a long time which can slow down watershed planning processes. This is not necessarily a bad thing - for instance, in the Purgatoire/Trinidad, community demographics are rapidly changing which could stimulate new interest in the watershed planning process. Implementing low hanging fruit projects can help build trust.
- Can Stream Management Plans go beyond flow recommendations?
  - Yes, there will usually be multiple objectives in any watershed planning process. It is important to take some time on the front end to understand overlap across different planning types so you can figure out how to meld objectives into one scope, which can be more cost effective.
  - Interest holders should come together before watershed assessments are undertaken.
  - It is recommended that groups start with more general analyses to build understanding of baseline conditions and help interest holders figure out their objectives and build trust. Once the general assessments are completed, groups can decide if an SMP is the right planning type and, if so, hone in on a specific reach or a wet meadow that could help attenuate flow.
- How can we address the challenge of people wanting to solve problems at the same time as data is being collected?
  - One option that has worked well is to invite interest holders to kickoff meeting with the goal of having them pinpoint their concerns on a map. This will help folks see the big picture and help the planning team identify any low hanging fruit.
- Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) is interested in learning how GOCO funds can complement CWCB grant funds.
  - GOGO seeing more and more project proposals come in around water - sometimes they are connected to recreation and sometimes not.
  - CWCB requires 25% match. The funds cannot fund trails, but they can fund river access and aquatic habitat restoration. CWCB can't fund upland aspects of projects.
  - DT Trinidad project - the project rose to top and they applied to CWCB and feds to diversion restoration and boat passage. Also have a concept design for recreation and they plan to go to GOCO once the concept is completed.
  - GOCO has a planning bucket of funding.
- Other notes, questions
  - How can we share resources to be better prepared to help groups with stakeholder work?
  - There might be a workshop on sustainable business models for nonprofits at Sustaining Colorado Watersheds.