

October 5, 2012

The Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group

SESSION SUMMARY

Revised 10/11/12 based on group feedback

Three white-tailed doe crossed the lawn outside our meeting room at TAMASAG about 3pm. Let's consider that a good omen. Our guest from the Grand Valley, County Manager Lurline Curran, admired our meeting place, and said Grand Valley water negotiators had found good food and a good meeting place are a big help to a challenging water dialogue like ours. Let's consider TAMASAG'S setting near the Poudre River and the Jackson Ditch to be another good omen.

Jackson Ditch came up during the Poudre history lesson directed by our other guest, Tom Cech. Tom, who now heads up the water curriculum at Metro State College in Denver after 20+ years as manager of Central Colorado Water Conservancy District, **painted a picture of primarily cooperation on the Poudre in the 100-150 years of its diversion for human needs.** He pointed out that for most of that history only one law firm (the one started by Ward Fischer, who was president of the Fort Collins Water Board for many years) settled the disputes of diverters. That's a lot different than the history on the South Platte, he pointed out, where multiple law firms during those same years have been engaged fighting battles between multiple parties.

Tom also pointed out that **Colorado's adopting the Prior Appropriation Doctrine as part of its state constitution was because of the "we were first" battle between Union Colony irrigators and the newer Fort Collins irrigators.** Most of us had already heard that story, but two points often missed came out: the likelihood that the threat of Greeley irrigators digging even bigger diversions *above* the Fort Collins diversions drove home the logic of "first in time, first in use," and the fact that the famous Eaton Schoolhouse, where Greeley and Fort Collins irrigators met (with guns, remember) was not in Eaton but somewhere just west of today's Windsor, perhaps not far from where Ptarmigan Golf Course now sits.

Getting to know one another and beginning to lay out our diversity of interests relative to the Poudre was the primary business of the day. Half a dozen—about 20% of the group—own water rights we found out. **Among us, we likely belong to more than 50 groups and associations with ties to the Poudre River.** (We will ask our graduate student assistant, Beth Plombon, to start a list of those she heard and we can add to it over time.) **Close to half the group, it turns out, fall into the category of "avid fisherman"**—so many that one participant invited us all to have one of our sessions at the home of another of the participants who he understands lives on the bank of the Poudre's North Fork!

Important “take-aways” from this first session:

- **The need for a clear understanding of “what is the problem” surfaced.** We learned from Ms. Curran that Grand County spent \$1M and close to three years on their *Grand County Stream Management Plan* that showed in their case the indicator of a healthy river is fish. Her group found that specific, data-backed understanding of the problem was essential to negotiating for enhancements. It is important for the various sectors to be able to clearly articulate what they need and want. We learned that the City’s Natural Resources Department has a committee working on ecological indicators of health on the Poudre, and that two of our work group participants are on that committee. Will hearing from that group what they are learning give us a good start at understanding what the problems are on the Poudre? Enough that we can identify in the next nine months some steps we could recommend to improve the river’s health?
- **It is a managed river, and that fact will not change.** The question is, how do we manage it better? The history of the river’s management matters and we need to understand it better, including the more modern history since the CBT project came on-line in 1957.
- **Northern District is an important player in the health and flexibility of the Poudre, with or without the NISP project.** They will be an important ally in potential enhancements and we should invite them to provide a participant for the Work Group.
- The question “who pays for improvements” came up. It was pointed out that **those who hold private property rights to divert and use water from the Poudre sometimes feel threatened by those who talk about making improvements on the Poudre.** They may fear potential for a “takings” of what is a valuable asset for those water rights holders. The group “got it” and were interested in the mechanism of citizens paying for ecological services that others pointed out is being discussed elsewhere in the community as a means of raising funds for improvement projects.
- The group agreed to a **set of operating guidelines for our group interaction—and our interactions with those outside the group.** We determined that Reagan Waskom will be our spokesperson to the press. The adopted guidelines are attached here.
- **Most everyone has completed the survey** our graduate student Beth Plombon sent out. Those who have not were urged to do so right away. Beth will be evaluating our group process for her master’s thesis and helping us with meeting notes and arrangements.
- The Poudre Runs Through It **website** will soon be “hot”—an assist to the group as well as an educational tool for the community.

HOMEWORK for the November 2 session, due no later than Tuesday, October 30, to be emailed to MaryLou at MaryLou.Smith@colostate.edu, with all statements sent out to the group to be read ahead of the session:

Each Work Group member will prepare a statement, in one page or less, addressing the following:

“What is your vision for the Poudre, what would it take to get there and what obstacles would need to be overcome?” Said another way: What’s your personal perspective on what you want the river to look like in 50 years, and what is preventing that? If you already have ideas for ways we could address those obstacles, what are those ideas?

NEXT SESSION AGENDA:

We will incorporate into our group those members who were not present, and we will drill down into the problems and obstacles (and perhaps solution ideas) you present in your homework papers. The steering committee will meet on October 12 to discuss further the agenda for the November session, so if any Work Group members have suggestions, please notify one of us before that meeting.