

August 6, 2013

Dear Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group Members:

You will remember that a group of students from the Natural Resources “Collaborative Conservation” class at CSU visited one of our work sessions last spring. They subsequently interviewed some of you. Attached is a report they prepared.

See what you think of their perceptions. I find the report especially interesting because they conducted their interviews during a slice of our process when we were just beginning to formulate real initiatives out of the dozens of loose ideas we were pondering to turn into actions. Likely their report would have been different had they conducted their interviews after our May meeting when we had coalesced around specific initiatives to act on going forward.

Take a look, and see what you think.

If you have any comments or questions, relay them to Beth or me.

Thanks!

MaryLou



Picture taken from www.raftmwd.com

Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group: A Collaborative Process Analysis

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I. SITUATION ASSESSMENT

i. Context, Drivers and Scale

The Poudre River of northern Colorado has been the target for various institutions, projects and events, all of them with the purpose of having a sustainable river with high quality water. But these initiatives were limited to dialogue, and none ended with specific action. They were often simply a very polarizing expression of position sides and interests.

The Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group started as a result of an effort made by the Colorado Water Institute (CWI) at Colorado State University. CWI has been working with water issues for several years and is familiar with the difficulty of an appropriate management of the Poudre River. The context of the Poudre creates complexity in the search for an appropriate way to manage this river. The important components that are increasing the urgency of a strategy can be divided into four categories:

Social

There are more than 50 groups and associations with ties to the Poudre River. This is an effect of the growing population that also increases the demands on the river. The Poudre River plays an important role in several communities (e.g., Fort Collins and Thornton); and it is a cultural icon and a Natural Heritage Area.

Ecological

The river is starting to be sensitive to human activities, such as the erosion of some riverbanks. The monitoring of the river has shown low and intermittent flows and fluctuating temperatures that make it difficult for fish to survive. Another important issue is the fact that invasive plants crowd out the native plants, which are needed for birds and wildlife to flourish. The increasing levels of eutrophication of the river promote the growth of harmful algae.

Political

The Colorado Water Law possesses some unique regulations that have to be followed when any action is taken about the river. There are cases where those who hold private property rights to divert and use water from the Poudre feel threatened by those who talk about making improvements on the Poudre. One characteristic of the river is that is highly regulated.

Economic

The Poudre is a main resource for different industries that use the water for various purposes: recreation, agriculture, breweries, etc. Decreases in the stream flow or water quality represent considerable losses for the businesses.

The effort to bring together different voices with a stake in river's health started with a series of public education meetings about the Poudre River hosted by CWI at Colorado State University in 2011. These forums had the purpose of increasing people's real understanding of how the complicated river system works. Through the meetings, CWI asked the question: how can we link these diverse community values in a meaningful way?

The next action taken was to bring together representatives of various stakeholder groups who possessed knowledge about the Poudre, the community, and the county. It was also necessary to take into account the downstream cities, which broadened the scale of the working group. CWI felt it was time to sit down with the major players and have a conversation about the opportunities to create a healthier working river for the human environment.

That was the beginning of a collective community dialogue among stakeholders and experts who actually have control of the system. This approach was something that had not been tried before and was the best opportunity for the stakeholders to begin to ask and understand how each other's sectors use the river and how those uses impact the system.

ii. Participants, Roles, Representation, and Collective Assets

Working Group members were selected by an initial steering committee based on characteristics of thoughtfulness, commitment to the process, expertise in ecological and/or human uses, and influence in the community as leaders. In 2012, CWI sent an invitation letter to a selected group of people that have an interest in the Poudre River. The membership is comprised of 25 citizens who are considered experts in their fields. Participants include ecologists, farmers, business owners, hydrologists, sustainability directors, government officials, and attorneys, amongst others. This represents an attempt to bring as many stakeholder interests, points of view, and expertise to the table as possible. Starting on October 5, 2012, the group met for a full day once a month, over a period of nine months, at the Tamasag Retreat Center on the Poudre River near Bellvue, Colorado. For a complete list of group members and steering committee members, please see Appendix A.

Group membership

According to Beth Plombon, a CSU graduate student working with the CWI and conducting her thesis research on the collaborative process of this Working Group, during the first session the group decided there were some members of the Northern Colorado water community and brewing industry that needed to be represented (personal communication, February 13, 2013). Originally, some representatives from these groups were invited to participate but were unable to commit.

Given the fact that group membership size would affect the efficiency and dynamics of the group, CWI attempted to keep the group under 25 members so that members could voice their opinions and progress would be made at the monthly group sessions. CWI and the steering committee attempted the difficult task of including as many representatives from as many of the larger/broader interest group categories as possible. However, there are still many other stakeholders who are not represented in the group (e.g. public school teachers, other local/state government officials, and general community members).

Individual roles and responsibilities

Plombon states that "each group participant is responsible for participating in dialogues, completing monthly homework assignments, providing their input and recommendations for future group sessions to CWI and the steering committee; and utilizing their expertise,

resources, and connections to help the group move forward/act” (personal communication, February 13, 2013).

In addition to providing their expertise and input, participants also have many valuable connections and networks throughout the community and the state, which can help the group to have a greater reach for future project support.

The role of the Colorado Water Institute

CWI provides logistical and organizational support and leadership in order for the collaborative to come together and function to achieve a common goal. CWI’s director, Reagan Waskom and MaryLou Smith, CWI’s Policy and Collaboration Specialist, contribute to the organizational leadership of the collaborative by organizing and facilitating the group’s meetings. However, five steering committee members and other group members also assist them. The aim of CWI is to support these members to help them determine what are the most pressing issues related to the Poudre River, and how to act in order to address these issues.

iii. Goals, Capacity, and Function

Goals and Objectives

Whereas many collaboratives start out with a specific, pre-determined goal, CWI purposefully avoided imposing specific goals on the Working Group. As MaryLou Smith pointed out early in our research, this omission was intended to allow goals to emerge from the group’s interactions. The invitation letter sent to potential participants in the early fall of 2012 did state that an overarching goal of the group was for the members to be “a community of diverse interests working together to make the Poudre River the world’s best example of an ecologically healthy ‘working’ river” (Smith & Waskom, 2012). The term “working river” refers to one that has been harnessed to meet a variety of human needs. To reach this goal, the group has laid out the following six objectives:

- To **increase cooperation** and break down polarization between those in the community who value the river for different reasons: agricultural, urban/industrial, environmental/recreational
- To **learn together** about the workings of the river for agriculture, cities, recreation
- To **learn together** about the ecology of the river
- To **learn together** about the full array of projects already being undertaken/planned for the river
- To **conceptualize** together new creative strategies for managing the river to meet multiple needs
- To **ACT together**—to light a fire under existing and conceptualized projects and strategies by combining efforts, leveraging resources, building an action plan

These objectives strive to address both conservation and livelihood issues. Through the language of “healthier working river,” the collaborators aim to discover actions that both focus on the ecological health and the economic well being of the river system (including those who depend upon it for a living). Additionally, the first objective, “to break down polarization” and

to “increase cooperation” targets the varying members of the community who hold different ideas about the needs of the Poudre River. The Colorado Water Institute clearly identifies the diverse players in the conflict over healthy ecological systems and healthy economic systems embedded within the context of the river. The objectives dedicated to learning more about the workings of the river (for both people and ecosystems) lay out further groundwork for approaching this issue from an examination of both a social and an ecological perspective—allowing those involved to address conservation and livelihood challenges. The clearest identifier of the effort to address both of these needs is the fifth objective that indicates the most important part of this work is to find ways to tackle multiple needs of the river.

While the letter, crafted by Smith and Waskom in the fall of 2012, states that the broad goal is to progress toward a healthier working river, most of the collaborative identifies that there is no specific goal right now. As of February of 2013, there existed broad-sweeping ideas about what the goal should be, but because this is a new process, the group is trying to “not be specific about the endgame” (M. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2013). Additionally, there is no written vision or mission statement for the collaboration.

From various sources linked to the collaborative (their website, published materials from meetings, a personal interview), it is possible to see potential vision or mission statements. The invitation letter states “in a nutshell, for the most part we want both a river that efficiently meets our human needs and a healthy river in its own right” (Smith & Waskom, 2012). The group’s website states on its homepage “The Poudre Runs Through It: Northern Colorado’s Water Future was launched in 2011 to bring together those of us who love the Poudre River to better understand it and the role it plays in our lives” (Poudre, 2013). Finally, the vision of the group as perceived by an objective observer is a “healthier working river” (B. Plumbon, personal communication, February 13, 2013). These small differences in the perception of an undefined vision/mission/goal prove to be problematic for many members of the collaborative (as will be further discussed in the interview synthesis portion of the paper).

Function and Capacity to Make Change

The Working Group serves many functions within the broader conservation picture in relation to water issues in Fort Collins. They strongly promote collaborative learning, as Smith reported “this collaborative is very much about learning together and finding where to go from that learning” (M. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2013). In addition, each member serves as a transmitter of knowledge for the group, a sharer and collaborator of ideas, a teacher, and a builder of networks. Eventually, the group hopes to move into the realm of also acting together upon the collaborative co-learning that they have accomplished.

The group is developing these actions in a twofold strategy. While they are not inherently (or currently) a planning collaboration, the visioning process is underway. They plan to have a public session in June to share possibilities for moving forward with creative management solutions that they hope will address multiple user groups. Inevitably, some of this work will include planning, though they do not yet seem to be at this stage in the process. The group is devising a list of final ideas that can be addressed either through the organizations with which individual members are associated or by member’s networks. They plan to go to the public with these ideas and say “here’s what we want to do with the Poudre, here’s how we want to do it, and here’s how we’re going to pay for it” (M. Smith, personal communication, February 20,

2013). The ultimate goal is to have more than a straw man to present to the public.

Additionally, this collaborative does not independently have the authority to make decisions or affect behavior. Their goal is to influence community members to act. Their stated plan for collaborating is to “learn together about all aspects of the Poudre River—its human uses and its ecological needs—in order to gain insights and develop strategies for how we can significantly improve the social-ecological functioning of the river” (Smith & Waskom, 2012). They envision that the end result of this will be “just the beginning: a set of action recommendations [they] will present to those in the community who can help us ACT” (Smith & Waskom, 2012). The collaboration will work as a visioning team and the implementation of their work will be largely out of the hands of CWI. According to Beth Plombon, the collaborative thinks there are small changes they can make happen. For instance, suppose someone on the committee is linked to Poudre Heritage, which has funding for signage along the river. This is a small change that could be funded and completed within the group. Larger projects, however, will require connecting with people in networks or even with the public at large to see these ideas fully come to fruition.

iv. Structure and Process

Structure

Every member of the Working Group represents him/herself, and brings in his expertise. However, most members are also attached to other organizations, including: Central Colorado Water Conservancy District, Colorado Agricultural Water Alliance, Colorado Foundation for Water Education, Colorado Water Congress, Colorado Water Innovation Cluster, Colorado Water Trust, Community Foundation of Northern Colorado, Embrace Northern Colorado, Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority, Friends of the Poudre, Legacy Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Poudre Heritage Alliance, Poudre Canyon Fire District, Rocky Mountain Flycasters, Save the Poudre, South Platte Roundtable, UniverCity Connections, and Western Resources Advocates. These organizations are not directly linked to the collaborative, but members sharing insights and expertise from these entities enrich the collaborative process.

Process

The meetings are held monthly. MaryLou Smith acts as facilitator, ensuring that everyone’s voice is heard and structuring the discussions, so that the process forward. Reagan Waskom acts as strategist/observer; during meetings he looks at the group dynamics and witnesses members’ behaviors and reactions, which are then taken into consideration to improve the collaborative process for their next meeting.

At the very first meeting sixteen “operating guidelines” were adopted requiring every member to respect each other’s opinions and background. This was done in order to promote fairness and openness. The collaborative process has evolved since it was launched in October 2012. During the initial part of the process, most of the time was used for individuals to make their voices heard. Now that the ground rules have been set up, more time is allocated to setting up projects for the future. Overall, the collaborative is trying to evolve from a learning process to action.

v. Progress and Outcomes

Monitoring or Evaluative Process

The collaborative does not evaluate itself in formal manner. However, Plombon will evaluate the group in her thesis at the end of the process. Additionally, the work of the collaborative will be evaluated at the community meeting where they present their ideas in June. Because there are currently no specific goals, it would be difficult for the group to track its progress.

Goals Met

Interviewees agreed that the process has allowed them to network and to get to know the other important stakeholders with an interest in water in the region. Unlike many previous discussions pertaining to the Poudre, this group has been a platform for civility and polite disagreement. While others have said that it is impossible to have an ecologically healthy river that meets human needs, this group is attempting to find a solution. In general, this collaborative has brought together people whose opinions and knowledge might not previously have been heard and has given the members a chance to share their knowledge and learn from others. It has opened up the dialogue between the major players, which is a step forward.

Accountability and Communication

The collaborative members have homework that they complete for each meeting. They are reminded to be on time and are prompted to speak if they haven't participated in a meeting. Because the members have a vested interest in the collaborative and are proud to participate, they hold themselves accountable.

In terms of communicating with the public, the group posts agendas and summaries of their meetings on their website, which allows the public to view what was discussed. However, because there is a relationship of trust and confidence between the members, specifics of what is said at the meetings are not communicated to the public, in order to allow the members to be open in the meetings. Instead, a general idea of what was discussed is posted.

II. INTERVIEW SYNTHESIS

Our research team attended one of the monthly meetings of the Working Group to get a better sense of the manner in which the meetings were conducted and the interactions of participants. Following this meeting, we spoke with Plombon to create a list of the "heavy hitters" within the group, in order to come to a better understanding of the progress of the group within a snapshot in time (beyond the situation assessment we conducted in the beginning of the research). Plombon provided us with a list of the participants, as well as indications of those who were willing to participate in a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B for full list of interview questions), and from that list we discussed with her who would provide us the most diverse and thoughtful sets of opinions. Our final interview list included five members with different background expertise, providing us a unique insight into the group from the science, legal and policy, business, and governmental perspectives.

After the interviews, our group performed a brief qualitative analysis on the information obtained, coding each interview for salient themes and noted important differences in perspective. From this analysis, we identified five major themes that each individual had insight about. These five include: outcomes and next steps, polarization and/or networking, the

collaborative process, flow of ideas in relation to interests, and the overall feeling that (at the moment we conducted interviews) there was no specific goal for the group to attain. The next section includes a discussion of these trends.

i. Outcomes: After June?

The Working Group came together in October 2012 and will hold monthly meetings until May 2013. On June 1st, a public session will be held to present the outcomes of the collaborative and decide on the next step forward. At the time we carried out our interviews, the outcomes that the group might come up with for June were still intangible for the interviewees.

The group as a whole is collaborating towards a *healthier working river*. That is a goal all participants agreed upon. However, practically speaking, actions that will emerge from the group towards that goal are not as easily set. At this stage, in terms of actual outcomes, our interviews highlight that relationship-building and networking were the most positive and useful outcomes so far (as is seen in the following quotes): “I have a working relationship, so that’s been a success”, “the networking [...] is enormous”. Some even added that if networking were to be the only outcome, it would still be worth it. In terms of expected outcomes, participants came up with possible projects. From those ideas, seven categories emerged: flows, restoration, agricultural water enhancement, organization and funding, education, policy and data. From these categories, the group divided itself into two subgroups to further investigate two topics that might eventually lead to final outcomes: the first group is working on the idea of agriculture, urban, and environmental cooperation to improve flow, and the other group is focusing on determining what kind of organizational structure is needed to turn the projects into action and on identifying funding mechanism. Another topic that the group is keeping in mind is the city of Thornton, given their important stake in the Poudre. The last two sessions will be decisive for the future realization of these projects.

Lastly, one might wonder what will happen to the group after June. Participants committed to the group for a year. Thus, June is supposed to mark the end of the collaborative. However if participants are willing to carry on in some way or another, (suggestions such as “let’s not let this group die in June” have been heard), CWI will support the decision to continue in whatever form the ideas might take. Furthermore, CWI is willing to modify its role if ideas for a better structure emerge. When asked about the topic of “after June” the respondents were not opposed to carrying on with the process but there were some concerns that if no tangible results and actions were reached by June, it might not be worth their time to take the collaborative further. Having said that, if by June many ideas have emerged but more time is needed to finalize them, it may be valuable to continue the collaborative process. This last portion of the process, from now to June, will be decisive in determining what will become of the projects and of the group.

ii. Polarization vs. Networking

Some of the themes identified in the interviews are the result of the questions asked. But there is an important and notable topic that came up without a leading question, and it is now one of the main outputs, goals, and definitions of success for the Working Group. This is the theme of the creation of relationships in an environment of respect and civility.

One of the characteristics of collaborative groups is the involvement of multi-level stakeholders that represent the different lines of action that can be taken toward the resolution of an issue. This union of interests, personalities, sectors, backgrounds, and even ages can be catastrophic without the correct intervention of the facilitator and the favorable disposition of the participants. For practical terms of this group, it is clear the importance that the stakeholders give to the creation of long-lasting relations that could be beneficial to their own interests, personal projects and future partnerships. The environment of respect and civility has been helpful for the dialogue and the establishment of a common ground. Despite the agreement on this outcome and the positive feelings with regard to networking, there are some participants that sometimes feel that their voice is devalued or not valuable enough for the group. One of the reasons for this emerging feeling could be the difficult role that the facilitators have in holding, reconciling, and respecting equally valid, strongly held perspectives. This is a consequence of the polarization that the group has shown, this collaborative involves about 20 people, 20 different worlds and 20 different ways of thinking; therefore, the polarization could be a normal feature of the initial work for collaborations, however, this polarization can be reduced over time and with the application of the 80/20 rule, finding the sweet spots between the stakeholders.

What kind of group is this? Learning, action, networking + Collaboration Process

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the varying purposes of the group at any given time and as time progressed. Members had teaching, learning, and contributing roles throughout the process. However, the overall function of the group changed over time. At the beginning of the process, the collaborative was a learning group. They progressed toward a thinking group, and they are now moving in the direction of becoming an action group. There seems to be a consensus among the interviewees that the group members appreciate the opportunity to network, learn, and teach, as they perhaps haven't had a chance to do in the past.

Interviewees were complimentary of the facilitation provided by MaryLou Smith and Reagan Waskom. The work group meetings have been run in such a way as to avoid destructive conflict and allow for the most collaboration. This approach has allowed the group to be more productive than it could have been otherwise.

The group's unique collaborative process brings together people with various areas of expertise and filling in knowledge gaps, the group can more fully understand the system. Without this kind of understanding, they can't hope to affect the system. By working from a bottom-up instead of a top-down approach, the group is able to define the process and bring together the various areas of knowledge its members possess in order to create a context-specific plan. Although the group, as a whole, won't be implementing the actions, its formation has created the opportunity for the stakeholders to meet and form groups to implement them.

iii. Interests: Diverse and Common

Perhaps one of the most important trends identified during our interviews is the dichotomy felt between the participants in regards to addressing common and diverse interests. This is important to understand for a variety of reasons. The group convening this collaborative

process is deeply aware of the challenges that can be presented when diverse stakeholders come together to discuss an issue as controversial as water in the west. They purposefully and very “carefully chose the participants” and “knew the players, the system, and [made] sure to include the set of best players.” What was important from the beginning was that people were “willing to be open, honest, and willing to put all their cards on the table.” In order for this collaborative to be truly successful, the group would need to have a space for multiple levels of learning, visioning, and action.

In her 2009 article on analyzing multi-level learning processes in resource governance regimes, Claudia Pahl-Wostl discusses the stepwise fashion through which change proceeds, moving from “single to double to triple loop learning”. These different levels of learning result in different levels of change. Single loop learning “refers to a refinement of actions to improve performance without changing guiding assumptions and calling into question established routines” (Pahl-Wostl, 2009). While double loop learning “refers to a change in the frame of reference and the calling into question of guiding assumptions” (Pahl-Wostl, 2009). And triple loop learning “refers to a transformation of the structural context and factors that determine the frame of reference” (Pahl-Wostl, 2009). This framework, conceptualized for analyzing governance regimes, can be applied to the Working Group. At the time of interviews, this group seemed squarely placed within the level of double loop learning. Many of the individuals at the table came in with ideas for the Poudre River that were solely from the frame of reference of their expertise. They were moving toward triple loop learning through the process of the work group, as their discussions would hopefully lead to action that might entirely transform the structures in which their frame of reference was determined—helping everyone see how their perspective fits into the bigger picture.

From the interviews, it is very clear to see this process. Some people within the collaborative are interested, first and foremost, in “getting the science and data on the table,” while others see the need for a problem to be defined in order to talk about solutions. Others know that their professional experiences limit what they can share with the group (for legal reasons and otherwise) and some members are part of the group purely for personal reasons, like their own “learning experiences and networking.”

All of these diverse interests must come together at the same table, where they try to suspend judgment and acknowledge that each perspective must be regarded with the same level of respect and attention. Each interviewee recognizes that the work of the group convening this collaborative created an environment that allows for a civil discussion of these perspectives, even while conflict exists in ideas.

Perhaps the most promising aspect of this collaborative process is the ability of everyone to come together over such a divisive topic and discuss it in a manner that seems very inclusive. Within the same room, representatives from agriculture, recreation, government, law, business, and water allocation share a common space and discuss their diverse interests. While their common interest, that of a “healthier working river,” is the element that brought them together, it definitely seemed that navigating the diverse sets of interests presented is the first big step to take. The process of this double loop learning requires that they examine their guiding assumptions. If they can get beyond this stage of learning, then the group has the potential to present very transformative ideas for creating this healthier and working river that they desire.

iv. Specifying Goals and Objectives

Finally, a trend that stood out from our interviews was that—at the time of the interviews — there seemed to be a gap between ideas and action. The problem we identified through our interviews was that group members felt there was a lack of goal for the group. While most of our interviewees clearly saw the value of networking and initiating discussions about the needs of the Poudre River and its surrounding communities, uncertainty about where the group was going was definitely a concern. Interviewees mentioned a “sense of urgency,” a need to define a clear goal, and moving from thinking to action. For the first five meetings, the group had been only talking about their interests, trying to define a common ground that would guide their vision (a healthier working river), but the mission was still unclear. An interviewee stated, “we seem to have spent several meetings rolling around with one another without a sense of what we are trying to accomplish.”

It is important to note that it appears that the lack of goal or purpose for the group troubled some of the members more than others. This might be explained by the fact that members have different working processes. However, a lack of a road map in the group could be a detrimental process for a group of people that have many interests and issues to solve. As mentioned in the previous trend section (*Interests: Diverse and Common*), having so many different stakeholders represented at the table also poses threats to arrive at a goal that pleases everyone. Members were able to voice their ideas for the group to move forward, arriving at more than 40 different ideas that were categorized in the following seven themes: flows, restoration, agriculture-water enhancement, organization and funding, education, policy, and data. This explains the wide variety of interests of the group, and the complexity of moving forward towards a common goal.

III. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

i. Challenges

A reflection on the perceived challenges of this collaborative process is presented with the hopes of illuminating some areas of growth or conversation for the conveners of the collaborative. Where possible, a discussion of how they worked to overcome these challenges will be considered as well. As identified, perhaps the biggest challenge for this group lies in the perception (at the time of research) of a lack of a clear mission or goal. As emphasized during multiple discussions with the facilitator of this group, this was very purposeful. In an effort to gain total buy in and participation by the stakeholders involved, part of the work of this collaborative was to organically discuss and develop together a shared vision and goal—which at the time of the research was identified as a “healthier working river” by multiple parties involved.

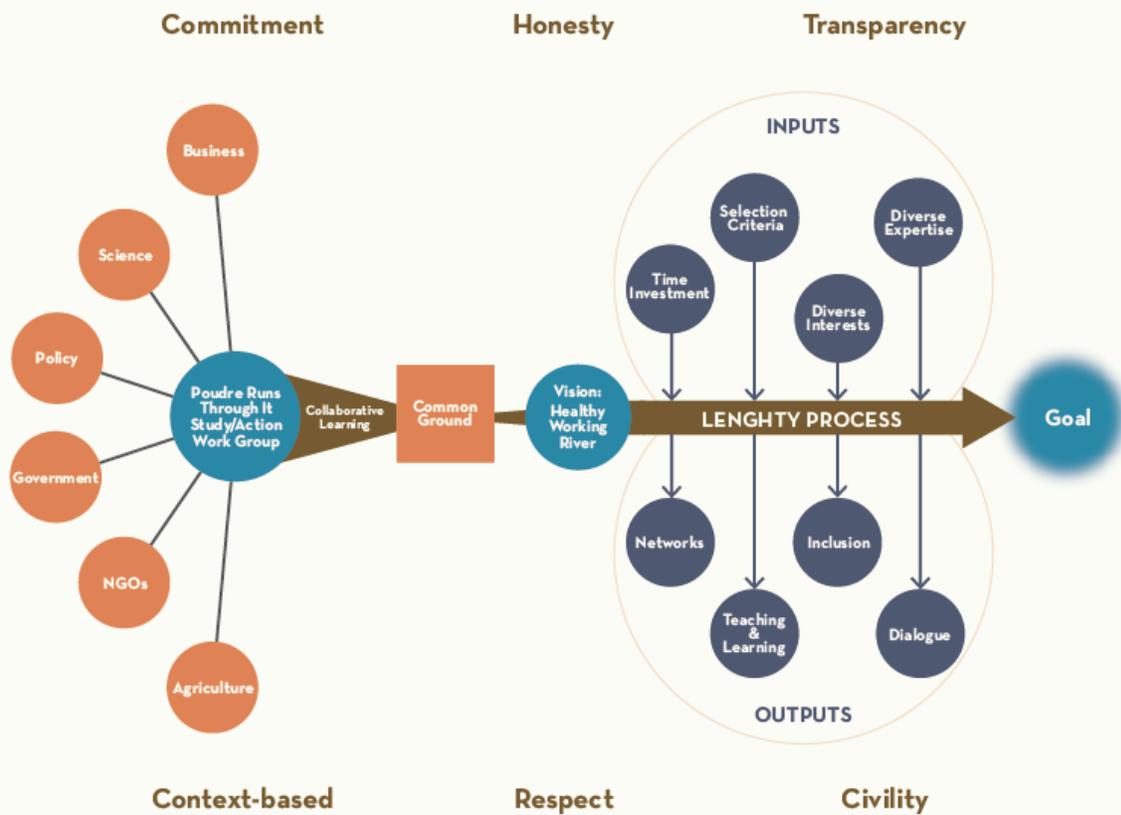


Figure 1. Diagram illustrating the structure and process of the Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group based on our five interviews

However, moving beyond the semantics of what exactly this meant seemed the challenge. Many people interviewed shared their opinion that it felt like the group was meeting simply to talk and talk and talk and they didn't have a goal that they were striving towards. While the research team acknowledges that this was purely a moment in time (and there is a high likelihood that the collaborative has moved beyond this phase) and the collaborative process is very dynamic, this perceived lack of a goal or an end in sight identifies a potential barrier that might need to be addressed to get everyone on the same playing field for next steps.

Another challenge of this process, as with many collaborative processes is the bringing together of very diverse backgrounds and interests. The group convening this collaborative worked, seemingly tirelessly, to create an atmosphere of inclusion and respect and most people in the group interviewed recognized their efforts. However, it also became apparent through our research that it seemed as though some participants did not feel as included as others—or if they did feel included, they did not see their ideas and input as a valuable contribution to the group. With this information, we recommend an evaluation of the communication methods used to ensure that those participants who have broad expertise in areas not related to water and water policy still feel like their ideas should be heard. There is a chance that some of these

feelings come from individual personality differences within the group or gender dynamics (as this is a largely male group). That being said however, we make this recommendation knowing that the conveners of this collaborative are striving for inclusion of the entire group, so it seems like something worth paying attention to—perhaps in noticing how much each individual participates and whether or not he or she behaves as if their input is valuable.

This point leads to another challenge that seems to exist in visioning collaboratives such as this and leads to a question worth considering—how do you ensure that everyone views themselves as important and valued within the group? And what do you do with those ideas that won't be used by the group? What do you do or say to those folks whose ideas are not chosen by the group to keep them involved in the process? Those participants who seemed most happy with the way the group was moving were those whose ideas were most likely going to be implemented, so when you have a group of diverse stakeholders and you can only choose so many ideas, how do you keep people motivated?

Other challenges identified in this collaborative process are time and outcome based. There are time constraints on varying scales that play into the effectiveness of this group. On a personal level, every member of this collaborative is participating outside of their normal professional responsibilities, meaning that they are already stretched beyond their normal duties. When a collaborative like this is formed and needs to convene, this personal time constraint does appear to place barriers on how much people are willing to contribute beyond what they've signed up for. Our interviews gave some insight into this as more than one person said they felt like the collaborative was looking for ways to rationalize its existence beyond June and beyond everyone's stated commitment. Additionally, the deadline of a June presentation of ideas to the public seemed to present some challenges for moving forward with ideas. This came in the form of uncertainty of the participants who saw the length of time it was taking just to lay all the issues on the table, and some people hinted that it did not seem like the actionable items would come to fruition by the due date.

The deadline in June leads to another challenge identified with this collaboration. After all of this work and idea sharing and co-learning is over, the question remains: what is the next step? Much of this probably depends on funding availability, but this thought also most likely shapes (to a degree) the perceptions and motivations of the group towards action. Will there be another group after this one to move ahead with ideas? What happens if they don't get to the actions by June? And if they do come up with a full list of actionable items and how these will be implemented and funded, how will they get the word out?

This final question leads to another challenge identified through this research process. Many of those interviewed, when asked 'how might you share this information with the public?' responded with an answer somewhere along the line of 'that's not really my job, I'm sure CWI has a plan for that.' While it must be acknowledged that the participants of this collaborative are giving up time from their very busy schedules to participate in this collaborative, it seems important to note that they do not appear see themselves as bigger players in this work (beyond providing expertise). While it is not necessary for them to know public relations strategies for sharing information, it does seem like it might be valuable to share with them the idea that their participation in an effort to make the Poudre a "healthier working river" goes beyond their one day a month commitment. Not a single respondent

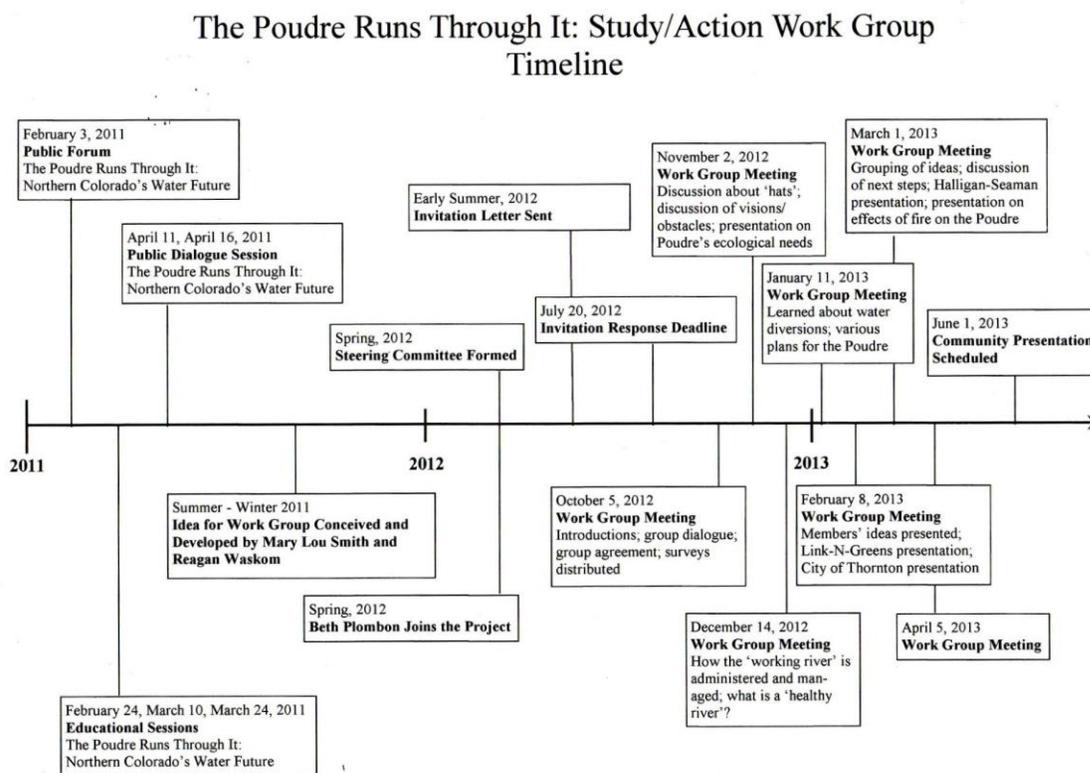


Figure 2. Timeline of events leading up to the creation of the Work Group and through the collaborative process

stated an opinion that demonstrated that the work they do or the conversations they have outside the collaborative space could also contribute to spreading the word about the ideas generated.

This also leads to another challenge identified. When it comes time for implementation of ideas and action, how does the group get actions implemented? One interviewee commented that, when working in collaboratives, they usually involve themselves as an “idea person” but they usually do not take part in the “doing.” It would be a problem if everyone in the collaborative felt this way. So, when the conveners have participants that feel this way, what needs to be addressed to motivate people beyond the idea stage? Ideas are usually much easier to generate than energy to act. How do you move into the action?

Finally, in considering action and group members working together toward actionable items, two final challenges arise. The first, when there are as many different power dynamics in a collaborative as are in this group, how do you energize people to move beyond those dynamics and work together? And, the second, how do you address issues of scale when developing action plans (take, for example, the impact that decisions in Thornton will have on the Poudre—communities downstream and upstream would ideally be involved in this collaborative process, so how do you take what you’ve learned here and scale up to regional implementation or even national implementation... and is this even possible?).

The group convening this collaborative seems to have addressed the first challenge well by creating an atmosphere of respect that nurtures relationships. Relationship building through trust is one of the best ways to overcome these power dynamics, and the facilitators have done an impressive job at this. The second challenge appears to be much harder to address. In inviting representatives from Thornton, the collaborative does seem to be addressing this, however the challenges that lie ahead, in terms of spanning different scales, seem (at the time of research) like something they will need to discuss further.

ii. Opportunities

It is always easier to recognize the failures and the challenges that some projects have than the correct steps. One of the main characteristics that needs to be present in processes like this one is the ability of adaptive management implementation. It is a key to success, but when the stakeholders are not familiar with it, it can create the sensation of running in circles and getting nowhere. As we can see above, the Working Group is facing some challenges and difficulties, but there is room for opportunities and amazing chances to succeed. These opportunities have to be always on the participants’ minds, and they have to use them to achieve the desired actions. These opportunities rely on special features of the participants and the context where the collaboration has been developed.

The main factor needed to create a working group that requires extra work, extra effort, and extra investment of time, is the commitment to the cause. The stakeholders are showing a real commitment to the group, and it has been reflected in the fulfillment of the assignments. Another example of the commitment is the rate of attendance at the meetings every month. The commitment is the glue for all the important parts required in the process.

Another big and unique opportunity for this collaboration is the well-created atmosphere of respect and trust. This has mainly been a group of dialogue, possibly due the respect of opinions and the creation of a perfect space for listening. There is a phrase that says, “lead by example”, and this is exactly what CWI is doing. Having a transparent and reliable facilitator,

with a neutral position who has common ground with all the stakeholders is a key piece in the pursuit to success.

One of the main concerns in the collaborative process is about responding to the question: Do we have all the key stakeholders at the table? While having all the stakeholders will certainly always be impossible, a collaborative process should always take into consideration who needs to be at the table, and aim to include as much perspectives as possible. The Institute spent months figuring out this essential part of the process, and with its accumulated experience, they made sure they had a good representation of many of the key stakeholders. The level of knowledge that the stakeholders have about the Poudre is very high. They are local experts in their fields, and this will allow them to understand the whole system, not just a piece of it. Another great opportunity that arises from having this high level of stakeholders is that they are prominent and recognized in the community, and this will be helpful when the time comes closer to share their ideas to the public.

The work that is needed in the future will be easier to handle now that the group defined a common ground and a common vision. That was possible due the teaching and learning process that the group participated in, creating a good cycle of exchanging of knowledge, everything based on respect. The great success of this process and dynamic participation, allowed the building of relationships. This working space has been appropriate for a conception of future projects and partnerships that will benefit their own goals and the wellbeing of the citizens.

While the polite atmosphere creates a comfortable environment for the participants, it is also important to have a functional logistic plan that ensures efficiency. Avoiding technical difficulties is another base element that will increase the credibility of Colorado Water Institute. This “behind the scenes” work is reflected in the success of every meeting (snack, food, facilities, nice furniture and physical space) and the monitoring between those meetings (updating of the website, effective communication, feedback). There is so much left to learn, but the adaptive management performed by the facilitators through listening to the feedback and concerns of the stakeholders will be an important tool to keep working in an effective way.

iii. Lessons Learned

Collaborating is a lengthy time consuming processes. However, when they are carefully and appropriately planned, their outcomes might be of much greater value. There is no panacea or a magic recipe that guarantees the success of collaboratives. Nonetheless, the following key components can be applicable to most collaboratives and insure a greater chance of success: the majority of key stakeholders should be at the table; adaptive management is a key tool; a good, neutral and skilled facilitator (sometimes more than one facilitator might be beneficial); and a defined plan.

An interesting question that was raised throughout our learning process is “when should you come up with a defined goal?” and “when should you move from thinking to action?” Collaboratives are organic processes; stakeholders come together and, with a shared understanding, agree on the goals. The challenge is to find the right time to set those goals, neither before common ground has been established nor waiting too long to the point when

participants feel like they are not getting anywhere. There is no easy answer to this question. Scholarly theory might give tips on how to do this, but on the ground it depends on the collaborative and its ultimate purpose. Furthermore, could it be the nature of collaboration that is making it difficult to set a goal, because stakeholders come with different objectives and interests?

Looking more specifically and closely at one collaborative group taught us a great deal in how collaboratives work. We started looking at the Working Group at a very interesting stage, a rather early stage where common ground was still being defined. There are different types of collaborative groups. This one is very short-term and has a different purpose from many others. It focuses on the educational aspect and on actions that can be taken towards a *healthier working river*. The importance of the term *healthier working river* is often highlighted by the facilitator through the process, “every time we say healthy river, we need to say ‘working’”. The realization of the value of that term was an ‘ah-ha’ moment that surely gave the group much more buy in as it was taking into consideration everyone’s interests. During the meeting we attended in February, we witnessed an atmosphere of respect guided by successful facilitation processes, which allowed for the different perspectives to be heard and valued.

Learning together can create positive conditions for collaboration. By spending time at the beginning to allow the group to learn from each other, the facilitators promoted greater camaraderie between the participants. This is an important lesson. However, with this approach, it is also necessary to note that it is essential for the correct people to be invited to the table from the beginning. If any stakeholders are not present during the learning period, it can lead to them being less informed than other members, unprepared to participate in conversations, and feeling left behind.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group Participants

Last Name	First Name	Profession/Workplace	Residence
Bartholow	John	Ecologist, Retired USGS	Fort Collins
Bledsoe	Brian	Hydrologist, Colorado State University	Fort Collins
Boring	Jeffrey	Resource Specialist, Larimer County Natural Resources Department	Fort Collins
Brown	Dan	Attorney, Fischer, Brown, Bartlett & Gunn, P.C. for Cache La Poudre Water Users Association	Fort Collins
Bustos Jr.	John	Retired, US Forest Service	Fort Collins
Caraway	Ray	Executive Director, Community Foundation of Northern Colorado	Fort Collins
Cronin	Sean	Executive Director, St. Vrain & Left Hand Water Conservancy District	Loveland
Malers	Steve	Systems Engineer, Riverside Technology	Fort Collins
Modesitt	Brad	Owner, Mountain Whitewater Descents	Fort Collins
Odell	Wynne	Partner, Odell Brewing Company	Fort Collins
Reckentine	Eric	Deputy Director of Water Resources, City of Greeley Water and Sewer	Greeley
Reidhead	Jim	Retired	Fort Collins
Robenalt	Matt	Urban Redevelopment & Public Finance, Fort Collins Downtown Development Authority	Fort Collins
Sanderson	John	Director of Conservation Science, The Nature Conservancy	Fort Collins
Sears	Bill	President, American International Investment & Trading Co.	Laporte
Seaworth	Troy	Farmer, Seaworth Ag Enterprises	Wellington
Shannon	Rich	Vice President, Pinnacle Consulting Group - Real Estate Development	Fort Collins
Smith	Steve	Manager, North Poudre Irrigation Co.	Wellington
Smolnik	Susan	Water Resources Engineer, City of Fort Collins Utilities	Fort Collins
Stokes	John	Natural Areas Department and Poudre River Sustainability Director, City of Fort Collins	Fort Collins
Trowbridge	Dale	General Manager, New Cache La Poudre Irrigating Co. & Cache La Poudre Reservoir Co.	Eaton
Varra	George	Retired Poudre River Commissioner, State Engineer's Office; Farmer, George Varra Farms	Fort Collins
Willis	Wade	Parks & Open Space Manager, Town of Windsor	Fort Collins
Wind	Brad	Deputy Manager, Northern Water	Berthoud

Steering Committee

Bartholow	John	Ecologist, Retired USGS	Fort Collins
Brown	Dan	Attorney, Fischer, Brown, Bartlett & Gunn, P.C. for Cache La Poudre Water Users Association	Fort Collins
Stokes	John	Natural Areas Department and Poudre River Sustainability Director, City of Fort Collins	Fort Collins
Trowbridge	Dale	General Manager, New Cache La Poudre Irrigating Co. & Cache La Poudre Reservoir Co.	Eaton
Robotham	Doug	Colorado Water Project Director, The Nature Conservancy	Denver

Conveners/Facilitators

Waskom	Reagan	Director, Colorado Water Institute, Colorado State University	Fort Collins
Smith	MaryLou	Policy & Collaboration Specialist, Colorado Water Institute, Colorado State University	Windsor
Plombon	Beth	Graduate Student, Department of Sociology, Colorado State University	Fort Collins

Participants were chosen for their expertise related to the Poudre River, including those from the agricultural, environmental, municipal, industrial, recreational, business, development, and other sectors. Another factor in the selection of participants was the intent to include individuals associated with the wide diversity of organizations with interests in the Poudre River.

Organizations with which Poudre Runs Through it Work Group Members are Affiliated

American Water Resources Association (AWRA) – CO Section	Fort Collins Housing Authority
Big Thompson Watershed Forum	Fort Collins Natural Resources Advisory Board
Cache La Poudre Reservoir Co.	Fort Collins Water Board
Cache La Poudre Water Users Association	Larimer County Farm Services Administration
City of Fort Collins Natural Resources	Lower Poudre Augmentation Co.
City of Fort Collins Utilities	New Cache La Poudre Irrigating Co.
Colorado Ag Water Alliance	North Poudre Irrigation Co.
Colorado Conservation Exchange	Northern Water
Colorado Dry Bean Association	Participant in Halligan/Seaman Water Management Project
Colorado Foundation for Water Education	Poudre Heritage Alliance

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Director, Colorado Water Institute, CSU

1. How was the idea for this collaborative conceived?
2. What factors did you consider when deciding who to invite?
3. How did people react to receiving the invitation letter? Did you receive any resistance or skepticism?
4. Is it part of the acceptance the involvement of water institute?
5. Before coming into this process, did you expect it would succeed?
6. How would you define success for this group?
7. How do you approach your role as facilitator?
8. What has been the most challenging thing or situation in this process?
9. What is the best thing someone can do as a facilitator to keep the group motivated and get the best results?
10. Relative to other processes you have been a part of, would you say the process of this working group is unique? How?
11. Did you have a model in mind?
12. In what level do you want to keep involved with this group? If they decide to keep going, do you want to keep going with them (after June)?

General Questions for Stakeholders

1. What is your professional background
2. Why, in relation to your current position, do you think you were invited to participate in the collaborative?
3. What role do you play within this collaboration? eg. learner, transmission of knowledge, support, etc.
4. What were your expectations before coming into this process?
5. Did you expect it would succeed?
6. How would you define success for this group?
7. What do you think are some reasonable outputs the group might achieve?
8. [When the time comes for PWG to communicate and engage with the public...] What do you think is the best way to bring in the outside community?
9. What reasons decided you to join the collaborative?
10. From your perspective, what do you think are the most pressing issues that this collaborative should address?

If you have time, you might ask:

- Are you involved in other collaborations?
- If so, will they be involved with the projects you decide upon as a group?
- Was there polarization in the group before?
- Is there polarization now? Has it been reduced?

-Is there anything you would like to add?

Personalized Questions

Ecologist, Retired US Geological Survey

1. Were you surprised when you received the invitation?
2. What was different about this one that made you join?
3. How many organizations are needed to “Save the Poudre”?
4. What are for you the most challenging and most rewarding aspects of the collaborative?
5. What is the most unexpected experience you have had while participating in this group?

Attorney at Fisher, Brown, Bartlett & Gunn, P.C. for Cache La Poudre Water Users Association

1. What political drivers affect the collaborative?
2. During the meeting we attended in February, someone mentioned changing the Water Law. How difficult would it be to modify the Water Law in Colorado?
3. Everyone has different views and focuses; does this play a role in not defining goals?

CEO at Odell Brewing Company

1. Do you feel that there is other people that are interested in doing this in the collaborative?
2. Could you expand a little bit more on the project you presented to the collaborative, about changing water rights?
3. Have you had any challenges in the process?

Natural Areas Department and Poudre River Sustainability Director, City of FoCo

1. Will you try to implement your projects yourself or reach out?
2. Does the group have any authority to do anything itself or just an idea team?
3. Would someone be driving it? The Colorado Water Institute?
4. When you walk into the room, do you take off the hat?
5. How would you say your participation is an asset to the group?
6. How does the city fit into the greater picture of Poudre health
7. What are the priorities for the city regarding the Poudre?
8. Based on your experience with this and similar groups, what lessons have you learned about effective process and expected outcomes from collaboration?
9. Any way to apply in other collaborations what learned from that to Poudre?
10. How is the amorphousness of the vision affecting how the group is working?
11. Was there polarization in the group before?