



News Release

BLM Colorado, Colorado River Valley Field Office, Kremmling Field Office

U.S. Forest Service, White River National Forest

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Stakeholders finalize management plan for Upper Colorado River

GLENWOOD SPRINGS, Colo. – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service have formally accepted the final plan from a group of Upper Colorado River stakeholders that seeks to protect recreational fishing- and boating-related values along the Upper Colorado River from Gore Canyon to lower Glenwood Canyon.

The Upper Colorado River Wild and Scenic Stakeholder Group Management Plan represents more than twelve years of work by 26 entities with diverse interests on the Upper Colorado River, from municipal water providers to recreationists.

“This diverse group, with seemingly different views for managing the Upper Colorado River, rolled up their sleeves and developed a plan that balances protection of the river with flexibility for water users. The work of this group serves as a model for other flow management efforts across the state,” said White River National Forest Supervisor, Scott Fitzwilliams.

“The final plan addresses an arena where federal agencies have very limited authority,” said Larry Sandoval, Colorado River Valley Field Office Manager. “When our federal land management authorities are combined with this cooperative flow management effort, all of the important natural and social values in the river corridor are proactively managed.”

In 2008, the stakeholder group formed as the BLM was revising its land use plans to include studies that determined which stretches of the Colorado River had specific values that make them “eligible” for protection under the 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The U.S. Forest Service

joined the BLM in its evaluation of the Colorado River, because both agencies manage substantial mileage along the river. The agencies identified several stretches of the Upper Colorado River as eligible for their recreational values, including fishing and floatboating.

As part of the land use planning process, the BLM and Forest Service deferred a “suitability” determination for the Upper Colorado River, which is the next step in the Wild and Scenic River study process. A suitability study analyzes multiple political, economic, and land management factors, resulting in a recommendation to Congress and the President as to whether the river should be formally designated into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Instead, the agencies decided to rely on the stakeholder group plan to protect the outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) identified in the eligibility phase.

The Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) supported the stakeholder group using the State's Wild and Scenic Rivers Fund for scientific studies, recreational surveys, and stakeholder group coordination and facilitation. In addition, the stakeholder group recommended that the CWCB appropriate three instream flow water rights to preserve the natural environment on the Colorado River from the confluence with the Blue River to just above the confluence with the Eagle River. The CWCB appropriated and the water court decreed those water rights in 2013.

“The essence of the stakeholder plan is monitoring and collaboration. We carefully track the status of the primary streamflow-influenced values to ensure they are not deteriorating and implement cooperative flow management measures when conditions warrant. We don’t manage the water rights system, but we are proactive in identifying possible issues before they arise and identifying voluntary cooperative measures that might be beneficial,” said Rob Buirgy, who coordinates the stakeholder group’s efforts.

The plan adopted in 2015 was a “provisional” plan. Between 2015 and 2020, the stakeholder group negotiated extensively to finalize “Outstandingly Remarkable Value Indicators,” which are the metrics used to assess the status of fishing and floatboating-related values. If these metrics are not met, the stakeholder plan includes a process for proactively addressing the issue and potentially elevating it to organizations with formal authority over river management.

The stakeholder group negotiated final “Resource Guides,” which describe ranges of other fishing and floatboating-related factors, to inform group discussions; and finalized a set of “Cooperative Measures,” which are voluntary and cooperative actions that, when available, may enhance the recreation-related values. The group produces annual reports with details of monitoring efforts and which cooperative measures have been implemented.

Members of the stakeholder group include: American Rivers, American Whitewater, Aurora Water, Blue Valley Ranch, Colorado River Outfitters Association, Colorado River Water Conservation District, Colorado Springs Utilities, Colorado Whitewater, Confluence Casting, Conservation Colorado, Denver Water, Eagle County, Eagle Park Reservoir Company, Eagle River Watershed Council, Eagle River Water and Sanitation District, Grand County, Middle Park Water Conservancy District, Municipal Subdistrict of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, Summit County, Upper Colorado Commercial Boaters Association,

Upper Colorado River Private Boaters Association, Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority, Vail Associates, Inc., and Yust Ranch. The planning process was done in consultation with Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado Parks, and Wildlife, and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The BLM and U.S. Forest Service coordinate with the stakeholder group via non-voting liaisons.

Copies of the Upper Colorado River Wild and Scenic Stakeholder Group Management Plan are available at www.upcowildandscenic.com.

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