**Partners for Ark Waters (PAWs)**

This document provides summary information from watershed collaboratives, partnerships and funds, with a focus on operational models, cost-benefit and lessons learned. The intent is to identify ideas to structure a Chaffee County Program that enables top community priorities identified through the Envision process, including:

1. Protection of water quality and ecological health (including accelerated forest treatment on public and private lands, habitat enhancement and water quality management),
2. Increased engagement and collaboration of community, business and non-profit organizations to support these goals

**Organization: Coalition for the Upper South Platte:**

**Executive Director:** Carol Ekarius

**Mission:** To protect the water quality and ecological health of the Upper South Platte Watershed, through the cooperative efforts of watershed stakeholders, with emphasis placed on community values and economic sustainability.

**Organization:**  501 C3 Organization, initiated in 1998

Board includes Aurora Water, Denver Water, 4 Counties, Conservation District, Conservancy District, State Land Board and environmental group leads. Note counties provide $2,500 to $12,000 annual funding.

**Formed as a response to:**

1. Concern from water providers about potential impacts of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act on supply, and
2. 1996 Buffalo Creek Fire – post fire flood/sediment impacts.

**Focus and Projects:**

Extremely broad: Focus on fuel mitigation efforts, post fire restoration work, mine reclamation, river restoration, sustainable recreation work (toilets and trails) and more. Focus on generating sustainable funding through partner organizations and collaborative program grants.

**Services:**

Grant development and management, subject matter expertise, project planning, project execution.

**Organization: Forests to Faucets**

**Executive Director:** Denver Water: Jim Lochhead, CEO/Manager; US Forest Service: Eric Connelly, Pike and San Isabel National Forest Supervisor; CSFS: Scott Woods

**Mission:** To improve forest and watershed conditions to protect water supplies and water quality, as well as to continue providing other public benefits, such as wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities.

**Organization:** Collaboration between Denver Water, the US Forest Service, the Colorado State Forest Service, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Program began in 2012 and was renewed in 2017 for another 5 year period.

**Formed as a response to:** The 1996 Buffalo Creek Fire burned 11,900 acres. In 2002, the Hayman Fire charred another 138,000 acres of land. The combination of these two fires, followed by significant rainstorms, resulted in more than 1 million cubic yards of sediment accumulating in Strontia Springs Reservoir. Following the Buffalo Creek and Hayman fires, Denver Water has spent more than $27 million on water quality treatment, sediment and debris removal, reclamation techniques, and infrastructure projects. Hayman Fire suppression costs for state and federal agencies were more than $42 million. In addition, the U.S. Forest Service has spent $37 million on restoration and stabilization efforts. The Hayman Fire led to a loss of 600 structures, including 132 residences. Total insured private property losses were estimated at $38.7 million. Loss of wildlife habitat, esthetics, tourism and recreation values are invaluable.

**Focus and Projects:** The **goal** of the new program is to **treat approximately 40,000 acres** within the critical watersheds and to **maintain, as needed, the 48,000 acres previously treated**.

**Services: Funding** for watershed management projects. **Denver Water** will invest $16.5 million in forest and watershed health projects within Denver Water’s critical watersheds. The U.S. Forest Service will receive $12.5 million of the total Denver Water investment and the Colorado State Forest Service will receive $4 million. Denver Water’s funding will be matched dollar for dollar by each agency for a total value of the partnership of approximately $33 million, to be used over a five year period. Additionally, the **Natural Resources Conservation Service** is pledging $400,000 a year for forest projects in Denver Water’s Zones of Concern.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sa7QzyzLTfw>

**Organization: Peaks to People Water Fund**

**Executive Director:** Heather Schinkel, 970-491-6562, [heather.schinkel@colostate.edu](mailto:heather.schinkel@colostate.edu)

**Mission:** To create a watershed investment fund where community members support land stewards who conserve and enhance nature’s ability to provide clean and abundant water, healthy food, productive soils, carbon storage, wildlife habitat, and inspiring open spaces for all community members to enjoy.

**Organization:** A steering committee of volunteers studied feasibility, then disbanded in 2014 and a working group of stakeholders was created, which wrote an Operations Manual. Organization consists of a Board of Directors, Executive Director, Science Advisors, Fund Manager and Technical Assistance Providers to ensure the Water Fund is effectively managed and improved over time.

**Formed as a response to:** Impacts on water quality and infrastructure from wildfires, insect epidemics, and increased development; impacts of climate change and increased frequency of severe weather; decreases in public conservation funding.

**Focus and Projects**: **Leverage current funding** programs and **foster expanded collaboration** in the Cache la Poudre and Big Thompson river basins. Envisioned as a voluntary, incentive-based watershed fund. Also considering a water quality trading program (similar to the one used in Lake Tahoe basin to coordinate fine particulate reduction). They seek to leverage the combined investments from multiple stakeholders, using collaborative, science-based analyses to prioritize investments and actions, and will have a tracking program verifying project outcomes through post-treatment monitoring. They also hope to increase resources available to support forest stewards.

**Services:** The Water Fund acts as a connector between beneficiaries, those who want to manage business risks or support watershed improvements, with stewards, those whose practices can improve the provision of nature’s benefits. The Water Fund helps identify priority places for restoration and best practices for enhancing those places in our watersheds; these priorities may differ in the upper and lower watersheds. Local businesses, individuals, or organizations (beneficiaries) who have a need for benefits like improved water quality, invest into the Water Fund’s watershed investment fund. The Water Fund then matches the investment with landowners, watershed coalitions, public land managers and other land managers (stewards) who implement new, expanded or improved practices on their lands to meet the beneficiaries’ goals.

**Organization: Rio Grande Water Fund**

**Executive Director:** The Nature Conservancy is the lead organization

**Mission:** To restore watershed functions by improving the health of streams and riparian areas, mitigate the downstream effects of flooding and debris flows after wildfires, reduce forest fuels in areas identified as high risk for wildfire and debris flow, support forest products industries’ use of wood by-products from forest fuel reduction, maintain the reduced wildfire hazard in treated areas, and secure sustainable financing from water users, government, investors and donors, and facilitate payments to upstream land managers.

**Organization:** The Nature Conservancy convened an advisory board in April 2013 to guide the formation of the Rio Grande Water Fund. Then a working group pursued Memorandums of Understanding with participating organizations and agencies. Currently, there are 60 charter signatories. Projects are solicited through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process and reviewed by a Technical Review Panel established by the RGWF Executive Committee. Final Funding decisions are made by the Executive Committee.

Executive Committee: Jake Caldwell, LOR Foundation; Rick Carpenter, Santa Fe Water Division; Dale Dekker, Dekker/Perich/Sabatini; Martin Haynes, Business Water Task Force; Cal Joyner, Southwestern Region USDA Forest Service; Laura McCarthy, The Nature Conservancy; Katherine Yuhas, Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority

**Formed as a response to**:  Frequent, high-severity wildfires and subsequent post-fire flooding, which increasingly threaten the Rio Grande’s water security and cause extensive soil erosion and debris flows that degrade water quality for communities downstream.

**Focus and Projects:** The Rio Grande Water Fund will **sustain treatments over the next 20 years for a total of 600,000 acres restored–a ten-fold increase in the 2014 rate** of forest and watershed restoration. The Rio Grande Water Fund is the tool to collect and facilitate investments in this accelerated restoration work. A water fund allows government agencies, water users, community stakeholders and others to invest in the protection of the forests that supply our water.

**Services:** The Rio Grande Water Fund will collect private investments from individuals, businesses, corporations and foundations. The funding will be available for thinning, controlled burns, stream restoration, post-fire watershed restoration, planning, education and outreach, and activities that contribute to the monitoring. The Nature Conservancy will administer private donations to the Rio Grande Water Fund, drawing upon the track record and lessons learned from 12 existing water funds in Latin America. <http://riograndewaterfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/rgwf-2017-annual-report.pdf>