

BIG THOMPSON RIVER ENVISIONING PROJECT



ABOUT THE BIG THOMPSON WATERSHED COALITION

The Big Thompson Watershed provides our communities with the water we drink, the food we grow, the fishing and wildlife habitat we enjoy, and the beauty we treasure. After the catastrophic flood of 2013, the Big Thompson Watershed Coalition (BTWC) was formed to undertake projects along the river. We have helped raise over \$10 million dollars in federal, state, and local funds for flood recovery, fish and wildlife habitat enhancement, fishing access, and wildfire mitigation. Over 150 landowners along 6 miles of river have been involved in these projects. We are a non-profit, non-governmental organization that fosters public-private collaboration. Our mission is to protect and restore the ecological health of the Big Thompson Watershed for fish, wildlife and people, and for the use and enjoyment of our community.

ABOUT THE RIVER ENVISIONING PROJECT

With flood restoration work nearing completion, it's time to think about the future of our beautiful watershed. What do we want it to look like twenty years from now? How can we ensure it will meet the long-term needs of our communities, our agricultural producers and our environment? Some of these questions involve forest and agricultural areas in the wider watershed. This project is focused on the protecting healthy riparian ecosystems by balancing environmental, agricultural, municipal and recreational uses of water. Fortunately, grants are available for this purpose. In November 2018 we'll apply for a grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to work with stakeholders to define river goals, assess current conditions, and identify strategies to meet those goals.

WHO WILL BE INVOLVED?

Like all projects undertaken by BTWC, this project will be stakeholder-driven. Riverside landowners, irrigators, environmental organizations, recreation and tourism businesses, water users, and local government planning and utility agencies will be asked to participate. The BTWC is offering to facilitate the effort. But the vision and goals will be designed by all who set aside the time to participate. We have already interviewed more than 30 stakeholders to find out what watershed values are most important to them. It's now time to bring stakeholders together.

COLORADO'S WATER PLAN

Chapter 7 of Colorado's Water Plan calls for the development of Stream Management Plans (SMPs) to support healthy aquatic environments and a robust recreation economy. Local coalitions have the primary responsibility to design and implement them. SMPs help identify voluntary projects to achieve multiple goals, including in-stream flows, for a stretch of river. There are currently over 15 SMPs in Colorado, ranging from a few miles of stream to entire drainages. Recent examples include water leases to bolster low flows in the Yampa River, and efficiency improvements to Carbondale's Weaver Ditch to leave more water in the Crystal River.

WHAT QUESTIONS ARE WE TRYING TO ANSWER?

Stakeholders suggested we start on a shorter reach of river to develop the tools and experience needed for later expansion into the greater watershed. The City of Loveland recently completed a master plan for a nine-mile reach of river from Morey Park to County Road 9E. We envision this project building on that work, and continuing upstream to the mouth of the Canyon and downstream to I-25, however the project's geographic scope will ultimately be determined by stakeholders. Questions our initial interviews raised that this project could answer include:

- How will river flows change in the future, and if so, what are the impacts and are there solutions to balance the needs of communities, agriculture and the environment?
- How can we best address water quality issues such as elevated selenium levels, water temperature and sediment?
- With continued population growth and development pressures, how can the Big Thompson River serve as both an oasis for fish and wildlife and a resource for the public to enjoy?
- Are there collaborative, multi-purpose projects that would improve water diversion structures as well as enhance fish passage and water flows?
- Which reaches of the river corridor are impacted by aesthetic, health and safety issues, and how might these reaches be improved and turned into amenities?
- Can we enhance the fishery and aesthetics to improve experiences at public recreational areas?
- What sources of data are available from state, county and federal agencies, and what information gaps need to be filled to identify future river corridor projects?
- How can the Big Thompson Watershed Coalition best serve as a central information hub that informs stakeholders interested in the health and vitality of the Big Thompson River?

NEXT STEPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INPUT

It's now time to bring those stakeholders interested in the future of the Big Thompson River together to develop a successful grant application.

If you or your organization would like a briefing or to be involved in this project, we welcome your participation! A BTWC grant application is due in November 2018. Feedback before then will inform project goals and tasks, so please share this information with others who may be interested in participating. The grant requires matching funds, including in-kind support, so we would welcome your suggestions for sources of matching funds, as well as letters of support for grant applications.

To learn more and become involved, contact:

Shayna Jones
Big Thompson Watershed Coalition
Shayna.jones@bigthompson.co
970-800-1126

