Colorado Cattlemen’s Ag Water NetWORK

Goal: Keeping Ag Water Connected with Ag Land

Phil Brink, Consulting Coordinator
2019 Project: Outreach and Training on Watershed & Stream Management Planning for the Ag Community

2019 Project elements:
1. **Survey** of ag producers (www.agwatERNetwork.org)
2. **Outreach** to the agricultural community
3. **Training** ag-oriented individuals interested in engaging / leading local efforts on watershed and stream management planning.
Question?

What’s Big enough to fill the
Pepsi Center
Coors Field
&
Red Rocks Amphitheater
Combined?
ANSWER:

Colorado’s Population Growth Last Year!

Capacity
Pepsi Center: 19,099
Coors Field: 50,398
Red Rocks: 9,525
79,022

2018 Population Increase:
80,000
With 80,000 new residents, Colorado is the seventh-fastest growing state in the U.S.

- +700,000 people since 2010
  *Source: Denver Post / U.S. Census Bureau
- Current: ~ 5.7 M
- Current 2050 Projection: ~ 8.1 M
Rising Demand versus Finite Supply

Non-consumptive: Recreation, Environmental – aquatic

Consumptive: Municipal, Industrial, Agricultural (stock-watering, irrigation)

Little known fact:
“More than 99.9% of the water used by an irrigated crop or turf is drawn through the roots and transpires through the leaves. Only a small amount (0.1%) of the water taken up by plants is actually used to produce plant tissue.”

Source: CSU Extension https://coagmet.colostate.edu/extended_etr_about.php

Planning is key to minimizing crisis and conflict
Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) The Colorado River Watershed supplies:

- 7 states + Mexico
- 40 million people*
- ~ 5.5 million irrigated acres*
- Aquatic life & wildlife*
- Recreation / hunting

*some in other basins relying on the Colorado watershed
Drought Contingency Plan (DCP): 3 components:

1. Increase supply (tamarisk removal & cloud seeding)
2. Storage (Upper Basin Reservoirs; Lake Powell savings account)
3. Demand Management (conserved consumptive use, ie. rotational fallowing, deficit irrigation, interruptible supply agreements, M & I conservation)
CO Water Plan goal for watershed / stream plans: “Develop Watershed Master Plans that address the needs of a diverse set of local stakeholders.”

**Water Plan Measurable Objectives by 2030:**
- 80% of the locally prioritized rivers have **Stream Management plans**.
- 80% of critical watersheds have **Watershed Management Plans**.
Watershed and Stream Management Planning Basics:

At their essence, watershed and stream management plans are created to:

a) Evaluate and prioritize local water-related problems
b) Secure and administer project funding
c) Design and implement improvements that help protect and improve existing uses, including agricultural, and support healthy rivers and streams

Plans are:
- Non-regulatory
- Locally driven
- Consensus-based (developed by water stakeholders)
Does Agriculture Need to be Involved in watershed and stream management planning?

Farms comprise approximately 48% of the land area in Colorado*

*Colorado Ag statistics 2017 Farm Operations; 31.8 M ac. www.nass.usda.gov/

Agriculture controls most of the water in Colorado
Producer involvement is crucial to creating balanced plans and protecting agriculture’s interests (water rights, land, etc.)
2019 Survey of Ag Producers
on Watershed and Stream Management Planning

Survey Facts:

• Survey period: January 16 – April 30, 2019
• 330 total responses received; 288 responses used
• Responses received from producers in 56 counties (88%)
• 84% irrigated, 16% dryland operations
• Eight (8) drawings for a $100 or $50 Cabela’s gift card during survey period.
2019 Ag Producer Survey Results

Green = ≥ 1 response
Yellow = Top 12 response counties
For your operation, what water-related challenge(s) would you most like to improve upon?

- Amount of water: 56%
- Delivery infrastructure: 55%
- Irrigation efficiency: 52%
- Water storage: 43%
- Water rights issues: 38%
- Water quality: 20%
- Technology: 15%

n = 282
What should the Priorities of a local watershed management plan be?

- Preserving and enhancing existing uses (agriculture, etc.): 63%
- Irrigation infrastructure improvement: 55%
- Creating a drought contingency plan: 53%
- Adding more water storage: 49%
- Groundwater management planning: 21%
- Stream or river channel and riparian area restoration: 20%
- Forest health / fire mitigation: 13%
- Improving water quality: 10%

n = 288
Who should lead watershed planning efforts in your area?

- Local conservation district: 60%
- Coalition of all local water interests: 49%
- Water conservation / conservancy district: 48%
- Local agricultural organization: 38%
- County: 16%
- Environmental / Conservation group: 10%
- Other (please specify): 7%

n = 286
If you were to participate in watershed management planning meetings, which of the following would be helpful to you?

- Having a better understanding of watershed management plans: 70%
- Not holding meetings during harvest, irrigation season: 56%
- Attending meetings via conference call: 31%
- Mileage Reimbursement: 18%
- Free meal at meetings: 18%
If you were to attend a watershed planning meeting, what time of day would work best for you to meet?

- Evening: 46%
- Mid- to late afternoon: 27%
- Mid-day: 23%
- Early morning: 15%
- Don't know: 11%

n = 286
Last Question!

Producer Interest in Participating in a Local Watershed Management Planning Initiative

- Not Interested (1): 2%
- Somewhat Interested (3): 39%
- Very Interested (5): 23%

n = 288
Summary of Producers Comments & Questions:

- More information is needed on watershed and stream management plans.
- Make it EASY to find out what is going on.
- Meetings: Short with well-defined objectives and timelines, and positive atmosphere.
- Avoid meeting during hunting, calving, irrigation and harvest seasons.
- Get rid of acronyms and jargon.

Agricultural Water Rights:
- Address security of ag water rights and agricultural viability protection.
- Work on leasing ag water for other uses. ie. Alternative Transfer Mechanisms (ATMs).

Implementation:
- Reach watershed / stream project implementation phase sooner.
- Funding needed for ag water projects – infrastructure, storage, efficiency.
Potential Projects that Benefit Ag and Other Stakeholders – Funding for:

- Assessment of irrigation infrastructure and funding for irrigation upgrades
- Storage studies (above & below ground)
- Groundwater recharge area planning
- River flow analysis; what is needed to better support uses (irrigation, stock-watering, muni, fish, recreation)
- Channel improvement / bank stabilization
- Creating dialogue with other water stakeholders which creates allies outside the ag community.

credit: Bill McKee
The Ag Water NetWORK will be continuing outreach and training efforts in 2020.

If you represent a:
• Conservation / conservancy district
• Irrigation company
• Basin Roundtable
• Watershed / stream management planning initiative

and would like to pursue outreach and training for your local agricultural community, please contact Phil Brink at CCA’s Ag Water NetWORK at (720) 887-9944 or phil@brinkinc.biz.
Survey report and summary: www.agwaternetwork.org

Questions? Phil Brink (720) 887-9944 or phil@brinkinc.biz