

ROARING FORK



CONSERVANCY

2020 Annual Report

EXPLORE

VALUE

PROTECT



Photo: Tenley Steinke

Message from Board President and Executive Director

This was a very difficult year around the world and here in the Roaring Fork Valley. Amid the ongoing pandemic, we were facing another hot, dry summer in the course of a two-decade long drought. Water shortages, wildfires, and long periods of zero moisture, now all too familiar stressors, made the summer, and the drought, feel even longer. The 2018 drought played out in similar fashion, however a moisture-laden 2019 allowed for a collective deep breath, erasing nearly all recollection of drier times, only to have 2020 bring them flooding back. How quickly we can forget seems to be rivaled only by how quickly we can adapt when faced with a challenge. Roaring Fork Conservancy (RFC) adapted to the new pandemic work environment and prepared for the recurring implications of drought. With new resolve to confront an old challenge in the face of an unprecedented crisis, RFC found innovative ways to serve the community and protect the rivers.

We developed a new slate of interactive online classes and resources for students and teachers, and took advantage of outdoor programming opportunities when possible at The River Center. From chalk art on the sidewalks to Riverscapes

in the windows, The River Center and the surrounding ecosystem became the gallery AND the exhibit. Innovative classes and after-school programs ran throughout the fall semester. Education offerings became a valuable and popular resource, as students and teachers benefitted from outdoor in-person programming and virtual opportunities. We bolstered our Hot Spots for Trout citizen science program which monitors stream temperatures in drought years, with a proprietary smart-phone app, improved volunteer equipment, and enhanced community outreach. We maintained water quality efforts, collecting important baseline data and critical year-round remote temperature logging. We launched an innovative Decision Support for Environmental Flow Management on the Fryingpan River to advocate for management of Ruedi Reservoir that accounts for local impacts.

The landscape, the river, and much of the community took a beating in 2020, and, with your ongoing support, we persevered. RFC and its supporters have carried on as the river does, in times of adversity and times of plenty. The river is a resilient refuge that is always there for us, and we intend to be the same for the river.

Thank you for your continued support!

“No matter how bleak or menacing a situation may appear, it does not entirely own us. It can’t take away our freedom to respond, our power to take action.”
— Ryder Carroll



Pat McMahon

Pat McMahon
President,
Board of Directors



Rick Lofaro

Rick Lofaro
Executive Director

Decision Support for Environmental Flow Management on the Fryingpan River

From the report issued July 2020 by Lotic Hydrological

The Fryingpan River is widely known for its gold-medal trout fishery and stunning scenic beauty. Ruedi Reservoir impounds the Fryingpan River 15 miles upstream of Basalt. Water releases out of Ruedi Reservoir support a renowned trout fishery, hydropower generation for the City of Aspen, and water supply for downstream municipalities and agricultural water users. Constraints on water availability and the timing of inflows to the reservoir make it difficult to manage releases to optimally support each downstream use at all times of the year. This is particularly true in dry years.

In times of water scarcity, water stored in Ruedi Reservoir is primarily used to deliver water for irrigated agriculture and habitat requirements for Threatened & Endangered fish species on the Colorado River near Grand Junction. In these years, modification of the Fryingpan River's hydrological regime can be significant.

Reservoir operations in the summer of 2018 highlighted the need for a more strategic approach to managing releases from Ruedi Reservoir. Recent dialog between RFC, Ruedi Water and Power Authority (RWAPA), City of Aspen (Aspen), Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), Colorado River Water Conservation District (River District), and the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) resulted in a commitment from all parties to participate in ongoing cooperative dialog about optimization of water releases to support multiple uses. RFC required assistance characterizing optimal water management approaches for supporting aquatic life across seasons and different hydrological year types.

The decision support tool aims to encourage dialog between RFC, RWAPA, Aspen, CWCB, the River District, and USBR in a way to produce a more informed water management decision-making process on the Fryingpan River across year types and into an uncertain future where climate change-induced alteration of regional hydrology may necessitate new operational strategies and release schedules for Ruedi Reservoir.

The tools created by Lotic Hydrological will help ensure that RFC is well-positioned to advocate for river health needs on the Fryingpan River.



Photo: Michael Schuster

Watershed Science & Policy

Addressing water issues, river health, and related land management through participation in public processes.

City of Glenwood Springs

RFC continues to serve as a technical advisor for the City of Glenwood Springs and the Glenwood Springs River Commission on stream health and policy projects.

- RFC is providing consultation for Glenwood's Three Mile Creek Confluence Comprehensive Planning and Design Project. This project includes erosion control, stream bank improvements, recreation access, and riparian restoration.
- The City of Glenwood Springs updated its land use code to enhance protections for riparian areas, a critical component for maintaining and improving stream health. The Glenwood Springs River Commission, a citizen advisory board, worked tirelessly over several years to support the proposed code and provide education regarding the long-term benefits to stream health. As an advisor, RFC remained engaged throughout the process to ensure these important policy decisions were made utilizing sound science. In September, Glenwood Springs City Council voted to enact the proposed code, bringing it in line with surrounding communities and adding valuable protections to streams and rivers in the lower Roaring Fork Watershed.

Crystal River

RFC, with the Town of Carbondale, and partners Aspen Valley Land Trust, and American Rivers, are in the process of fundraising for construction designed to restore and enhance a one-half mile, 18-acre reach of the Crystal River as it flows through the town of Carbondale. The project involves planning and design for: restoration of the riparian area along the west side of the river, in-river work for the Weaver Ditch diversion structure and in-river habitat and bank improvements. It also calls for enhanced user experience and passive educational opportunities.

With several grants pending and over \$150,000 already secured, RFC is hopeful for construction to begin in late 2021.

Colorado River Basin

RFC continues to be an active participant in the Colorado Basin Roundtable, providing input on Demand Management discussions and the Basin Implementation Plan update.

Grizzly Creek Wildfire

In light of the devastating Grizzly Creek Wildfire which burned throughout Glenwood Canyon this summer, RFC has joined the Glenwood Canyon Restoration Alliance, a collaboration of local non-profits and government agencies planning community engagement, and restoration work in Glenwood Canyon after the fire.

Fryingpan River

- Winter of 2020 produced near average snowpack, however a hot and dry spring, summer and fall exacerbated drought conditions. To mitigate low winter releases from Ruedi Reservoir, scheduled to run at the minimum of 39 cfs or matching inflow, RFC again worked with the Colorado Water Conservation Board and Colorado River Water Conservation District to secure a lease of 3,500 acre-feet to supplement low flows. Because of the concern for aquatic life and anchor ice formation, the supplemental flow will be released January through March as needed to benefit the Fryingpan River ecosystem. Any remaining water will be used to benefit endangered fish on the 15-Mile Reach of the Colorado River.
- RFC worked with Lotic Hydrological to develop a Decision Support System for Fryingpan Flows. The model focuses on hydrological and biological variables in an attempt to illustrate how the conditional state of important ecosystem characteristics might respond to reservoir management activities that impact typical spring flows, peak flow timing and magnitude, summer flows, fall flows, and winter flows. (See related article on page 4.)

An Educational Success Story: RFC's Education is Adapting and Thriving

Amid a myriad of restrictions and challenges, leading students to rivers has never been more important. The innate desire for connection to natural spaces and to each other, drove the effort to continue offering educational programming and experiences despite the challenges. Creativity and an out-of-the-box approach were the foundation for creating programs that became the resources schools so desperately needed. Students playing and exploring safely along the riverbanks brought a sense of peace and hope during arduous times.

RFC maintained its commitment of creating deep and meaningful programs, and offered a series of classes that built on each other, to different grade levels. These series of programs gave students multiple experiences creating impacts that are deeper than one-time educational experiences. Local schools were grateful for the chance to get a reprieve from the classroom. Through a mixture of virtual programs, videos, and outdoor learning, RFC continued to see smiles and hear laughter as students connected to and learned about our rivers.



Created programming for Pitkin County Open Space and Trails that taught the importance of assessing and protecting valuable riparian habitat, and gave students a sense of empowerment and hope for current and future natural spaces.



A Ross Montessori kindergartner learned how bats depend on healthy rivers.



Developed online Google lessons that guided local high school students through using our interactive watershed map tools.

“Thank you so much for your continued support during our distance learning time!”

-Terrilee Crabb, Basalt Elementary School



Two Rivers Community School dove into an in-depth trout study with a series of RFC in-school programs. Captain Cutthroat was a big hit!



Using a Pitkin County Open Space and Trails map, students from Aspen Country Day School worked together identifying areas that have high value riparian land.

“Our 4th grade team would like to sincerely thank you for putting together the experiment videos! We assigned it as today’s fieldwork, and the feedback from the kids is that they enjoyed it very much.”

-Julie Allen, Glenwood Springs Elementary School



Created weekly videos during shelter in place that were utilized by nine local schools.



RFC and Basalt Library Teen program co-taught live, virtual art classes and guided experiences that inspired students to connect to rivers.



Aspen Country Day School students conducted water quality monitoring at North Star Preserve near Aspen.



All 3rd-6th grade students at Ross Montessori School participated in multi-day classes investigating riparian ecology, which also included using dip nets to collect macroinvertebrates.



RFC educators created and taught a series of in-person programs for multiple grade levels and camps.



Installed a new Augmented Reality Sand Table at The River Center. Outside access allowed students to safely manipulate the sand to learn about and create their own watersheds. Students of all ages love playing with this amazing tool.



Created a new video to help the educational efforts on recreating responsibly at North Star Preserve.

EDUCATION IMPACTS

Roaring Fork Conservancy taught **197** education programs making over **5,170** contacts in 2020!

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

- 13** Watershed Explorations were offered in 2020 including river floats, hikes through riparian habitat, snowshoe walk, and excursions to view fireflies in rare thermal wetlands. **163** individuals participated in 2020 Watershed Explorations.
- 26** Summer Camp, Basalt Library and After School programs reached **288** youth.
- 23** Participants in our Women's Fly Fishing Clinic and Adult Beginner Fly Fishing Clinic.
- 21** Educational and informational YouTube videos created by RFC staff generated **1,300** views.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 6** 1st year raft guides received River Ecology Interpretation training.
- 6** Virtual community and state-wide professional conference presentations reached **639** participants.



SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Roaring Fork Conservancy educators taught **126** river and watershed related school programs reaching

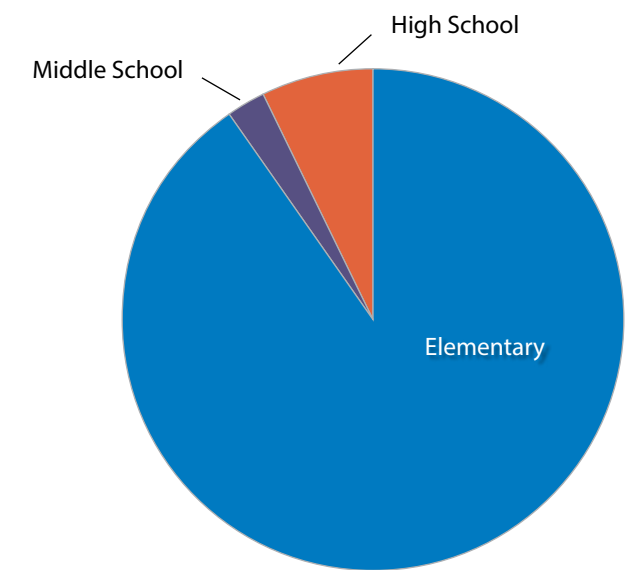
3,173 STUDENTS

2,868 Elementary School students

84 Middle School students

221 High School students

20% of school programs took place at The River Center.



Community Outreach and Engagement



Fryingpan & Beyond River Cleanup

The 22nd annual Fryingpan & Beyond River Cleanup looked different this year. Instead of a one-day event this year's Cleanup took place over five days, allowing individuals and families to practice social distancing while collecting road-side debris. Over 100 residents and visitors picked up trash along 14 miles of road adjacent to the Fryingpan River; the Roaring Fork River from Basalt to Glenwood Springs; and even along the Colorado River.

River Stewards

RFC's River Stewards, a dedicated group of young professionals, spearhead community engagement events to inspire young river enthusiasts to explore, value, and protect the Roaring Fork Watershed. These passionate individuals helped kickoff this year's Fryingpan & Beyond River Cleanup, ran several social media campaigns, and ushered in new members and officers. This fun, multi-talented, and committed cohort meets monthly, often over a beer or on the water.

Hikes with RFC & RFOV

Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers invited RFC to provide education and interpretation on two hikes this summer.

- ▲ An RFC educator joined RFOV on a hike along the Jess Weaver Trail in Glenwood Canyon. Participants learned about the history of the trail, the unique geographical and ecological features found in No Name Canyon, and the benefits of riparian habitats.

- ▲ RFC's science and policy staff was one of six stops along the Lake Christine Tour. Participants on this tour learned about the history, Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) analysis, and restoration efforts to date.

Lake Christine Planting Project

RFC partnered with Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers and Colorado Parks and Wildlife for a second consecutive year of a Lake Christine Restoration Project. Twenty-four volunteers hiked the varied terrain to clear vegetation for drainage and helped control thistles in the burn area.

Hot Spots for Trout

A dry spring and summer led to below average flows, resulting in increased water temperature. Higher water temperature does not have as much dissolved oxygen in it, which can stress fish and other aquatic life. To monitor these conditions, RFC staff and twenty-five volunteers collected water temperature data from around the Roaring Fork Watershed. Data was added to a newly created Hot Spots for Trout app and database. Thankfully, we made it through the height of summer with very few recorded temperatures that were dangerous. When a trend in high temperatures lingering above 60* F with noted mortalities were observed, field biologists could be deployed to locate the area of concern and make in-person observations. This new app enhanced RFC's ability to monitor the watershed and engage with volunteers to efficiently identify future water quality and habitat concerns.

City of Glenwood Springs

RFC partnered with the Glenwood Springs River Commission on numerous community outreach and education projects:

- ▲ RFC and the Middle Colorado Watershed Council presented on the benefits of riparian areas during a virtual community discussion organized by the Glenwood Springs River Commission and hosted by Mayor Jonathan Godes. The 30-minute discussion *Healthy River Ecosystems and Economics: What are riparian zones & why do they matter?* can be viewed at: facebook.com/GlenwoodSpringsCO/videos
- ▲ Joined the Glenwood Springs RiverFEST, a river cleanup event where dozens of participants collected trash along streams and rivers in Glenwood. This year's event was spread out over a week, allowing participants to socially distance while getting outside to help clean up local waterways in their family groups.
- ▲ Participated in a riparian planting project at Veltus Park, where Glenwood Springs River Commission members and partners planted over 60 riparian trees and shrubs along the Roaring Fork River. This added to previous restoration work conducted by the City of Glenwood Springs in this area, helping to further enhance riparian areas in the park.

Riverscapes

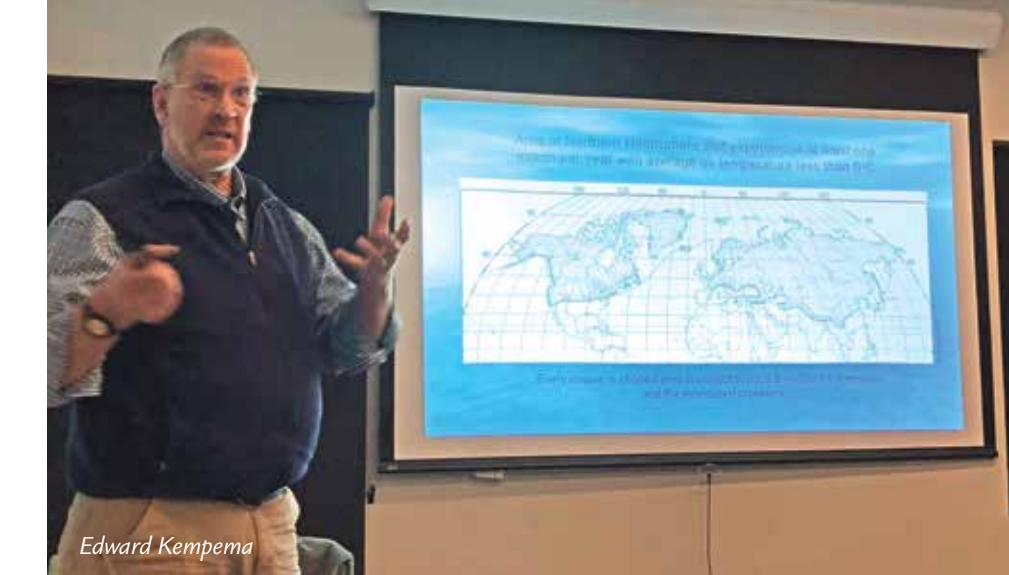
Riverscapes was a summer community event that brought people together to celebrate our rivers through art. The program kicked off with a collaboration with the Basalt Regional Library, where library and RFC staff co-taught live virtual classes over the course of two weeks. The teenage participants were given a free bag of art supplies and were guided through art and science lessons, which they used to complete assignments in the field. After working independently on their projects, they returned each day to virtually share their art pieces and experiences with one another. This online program culminated in a watershed self-portrait that reflected each participant's connection to the watershed and rivers. Their art pieces were exhibited at a walk-by gallery on the windows of The River Center. The community was invited to view the gallery and stay to create their own sidewalk chalk masterpieces. Sidewalk squares were framed in fish scale tape and reserved for families and individuals. The River Center became a thriving interactive space that allowed the community to take a moment, connect to our rivers, and share that connection through art.

The Brooksher Watershed Institute is a series of presentations addressing our most precious resource, water. With water leaders discussing the most current water-related issues at the local, state and regional level, these presentations provide opportunities for the public to engage in one-on-one dialogue with these water leaders.

In its second year, The Brooksher

Watershed Institute hosted four water leaders from around the world covering topics such as river-related economics, river ice, the changing environment of the Colorado River Basin and the challenges of kayaking one of the world's largest rivers, reaching over 100 people both in person (in early 2020) and through virtual presentations.

Brooksher Watershed Institute recorded presentations, slides or



Edward Kempema

related reports are available at www.roaringfork.org/education-and-outreach/brooksher-watershed-institute/.



2020 Brooksher Watershed Institute Speakers



Darcy Gaechter



The Economic Impact of River Recreation in Colorado
Molly Mugglestone, Director of Colorado Policy and Communications, Business for Water Stewardship

Rising Temperatures and Declining Flows: The Current and Likely Future of the Colorado River Basin
Andy Mueller, General Manager, Colorado River Water Conservation District

The Amazon River: Facing Fears, Chasing Dreams, and A Quest to Kayak the Largest River from Source to Sea
Darcy Gaechter, World Kayaker & Owner/Operator of Small World Adventures in Ecuador

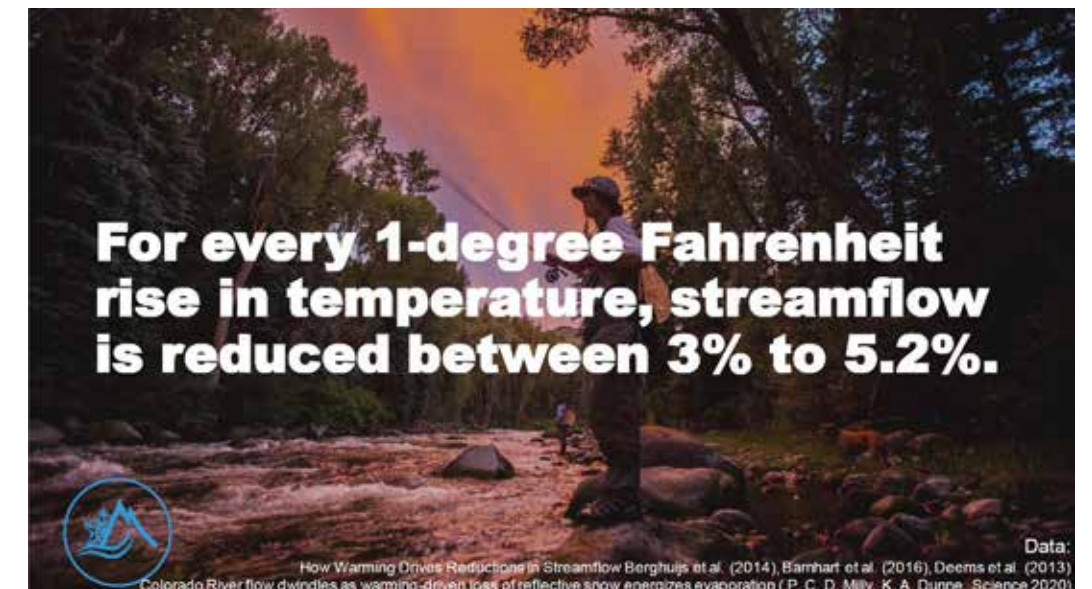
Anchor Ice in Mountain Rivers
Edward Kempema, Ph.D., Senior Research Scientist, University of Wyoming



Molly Mugglestone



Andy Mueller



Roaring Fork Watershed

WATERSHED WIDE

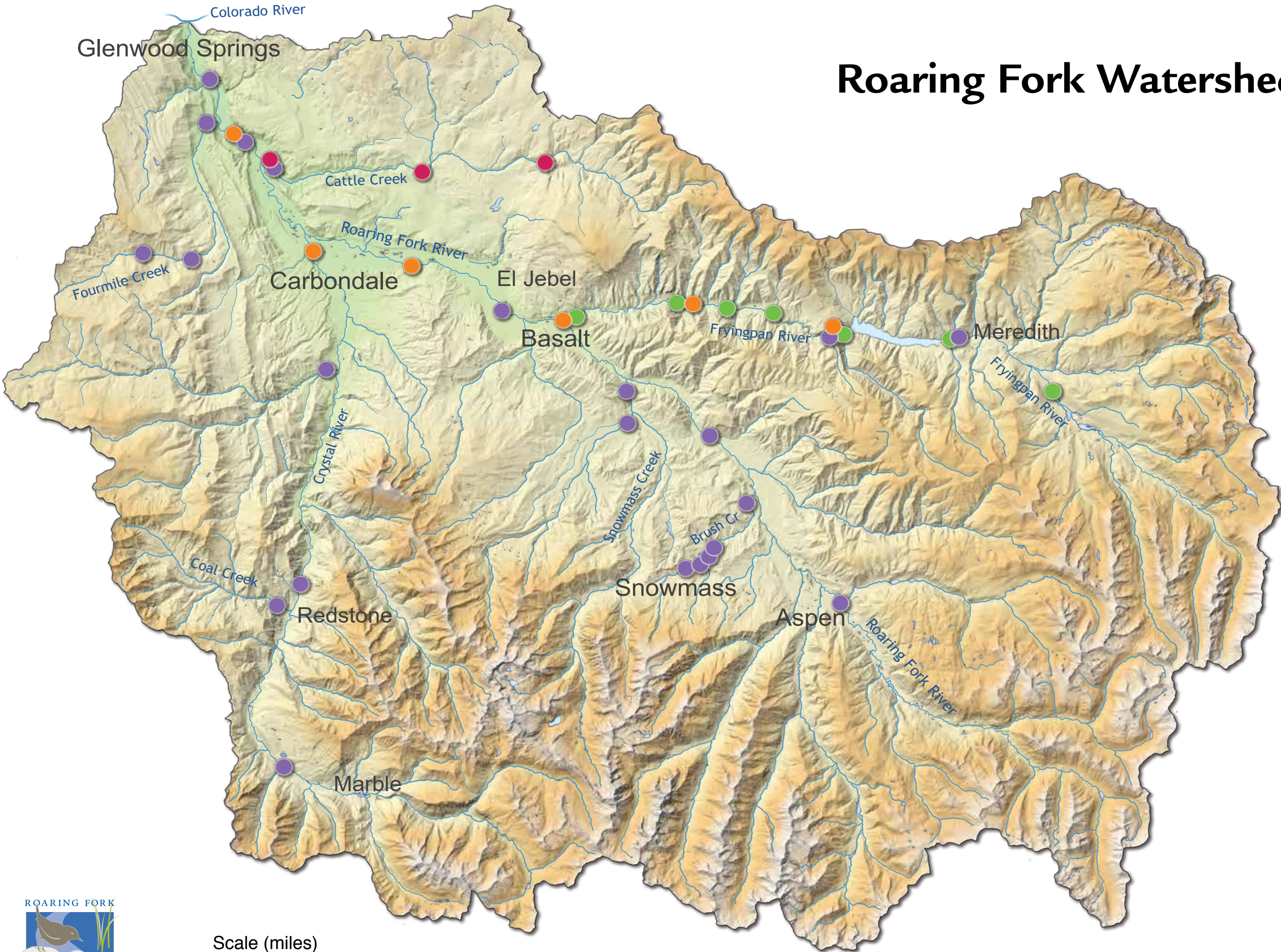
Every year RFC conducts a variety of water quality monitoring and stream science field work throughout the Roaring Fork Watershed. This year was no exception with the continuation of numerous projects and ongoing research. These projects typically fall into two categories:

- Baseline WQ monitoring used to develop long-term datasets, or
- Targeted studies implemented to study a specific stream, parameter, or concern.

This map shows the various projects conducted in 2020 and their approximate locations. See pages 18-19 to learn more about specific projects.

LEGEND

- Baseline Water Quality Monitoring Sites
- Cattle Creek Water Quality Sites
- Fryingpan River Didymo Survey Sites
- Temperature Logger Sites



Scale (miles)



Water Quality Accomplishments



RFC's River Watch Program

- Conducted regular baseline water quality monitoring at 22 Roaring Fork Watershed sites, including 106 sampling events. Throughout this year, many volunteer stream teams continued to stay engaged with outdoor field work while RFC staff conducted the majority of the lab analysis, allowing this valuable work to continue while incorporating important COVID-19 safety protocols.
- Assisted with the annual River Watch state training in Estes Park, CO, by co-teaching water quality monitoring and in-stream measurement protocols. Held in February, this was the first winter River Watch training. Participants included 35 brave individuals and a diverse mix of students, teachers, watershed groups, and staff from the state Water Quality Control Division.
- Served as a mentor for watershed groups within the state which are joining or renewing their participation in the River Watch program and looking for guidance as they develop their water quality monitoring programs.



While adapting to COVID-19 impacts on home and work life, Chad Rudow, RFC's water quality program manager, gained a couple of interns for field work in the spring and summer of 2020. His sons, Asher (age 11) and Bridger (age 8), regularly joined him for field days and quickly became "expert" assistants. An article and photo-essay of their work was highlighted in the *Sopris Sun* on April 23 and can be found at <https://issuu.com/soprissun/docs/soprissun-04232020-issuu>.

Cattle Creek

- For the sixth consecutive year, RFC conducted targeted biological, and chemical monitoring on Cattle Creek with funding from Garfield and Eagle Counties. Water quality and stream flows were measured throughout the year at three sites, documenting this year's drought and corresponding low flow conditions and their potential impacts on water quality.
- In 2017, RFC submitted macroinvertebrate data to the Colorado Water Quality Control Division (WQCD) to address the current 303(d) impairment listing of the creek. Based primarily on this data and a revised state metric, in January 2020 the WQCD officially removed Cattle Creek from the impaired list for macroinvertebrates.



Fryingpan River

- This marks RFC's seventh year monitoring levels of the algae *Didymosphenia geminata* (didymo) in the Fryingpan River. Surveys of didymo stream bed coverage and basic water quality monitoring were conducted at seven locations in spring, summer, and fall.
- Temperature loggers continue to be maintained at three different locations in the Fryingpan River. These loggers measure stream temperature every hour and have operated year-round since 2013, generating over 143,000 data points.



Temperature Monitoring

The 2020 water year brought drought and low-flow conditions to local rivers leading to concerns of water quality impacts, particularly relating to high temperatures. In response, RFC Water Quality staff updated and maintained temperature loggers installed in the lower Roaring Fork and Crystal Rivers. The loggers have been operating since drought conditions in 2018 and were closely monitored throughout this summer. Data was shared with Colorado Parks and Wildlife in a joint effort to monitor potential temperature impacts on aquatic life.



Roaring Fork Conservancy's 2020 National Council

After a year of the unpredictable, we wanted to highlight pleasant Memories from the Watershed!

Representing all parts of the United States, RFC National Council members make annual contributions of \$1,500+ that enable us to serve as a voice for the rivers, execute sound river science, inform decision-makers, and educate the next generation of river stewards.

Thank You to our 2020 National Council Members!

Your commitment helps ensure that future generations can make their own watershed memories in the special places we all value!

WE REMEMBER 2016 RIVER CONSERVATOR:
Meredith Long

"Meredith's legacy of generous support and love for the Roaring Fork and Fryingpan Valleys will live on with the miles of rivers and streams that he helped protect and the thousands of future river stewards that have benefited from our education programs."

— Rick Lofaro, Executive Director



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Kay & Robert Watson
Sherry & Brit White
Marie & Bill Wise

If you'd like to join RFC's 2021 National Council please contact Sheryl Sabandal at sheryl@roaringfork.org. Thank you to our National Council Members that shared photos of their Watershed Memories with us!





John & Laura Marlow
Getting Engaged...
In the Fryingpan River
August 18, 1998



THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT DURING OUR *Year without River Rendezvous.*

Thank you again to our supporters that stepped up when most needed to ensure our important work in the Watershed could adapt and continue.

Thank You

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Carolyn Workman & Kurt Wacker | Phyllis & Larry Yaw

Stay tuned for Summer 2021 as we announce fun, safe, and educational opportunities to socialize with friends and celebrate the Watershed!

**National Council Members support RFC at the \$1,500+ level and above on an annual basis. If you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact Development Director, Sheryl Sabandal, at sheryl@roaringfork.org.*

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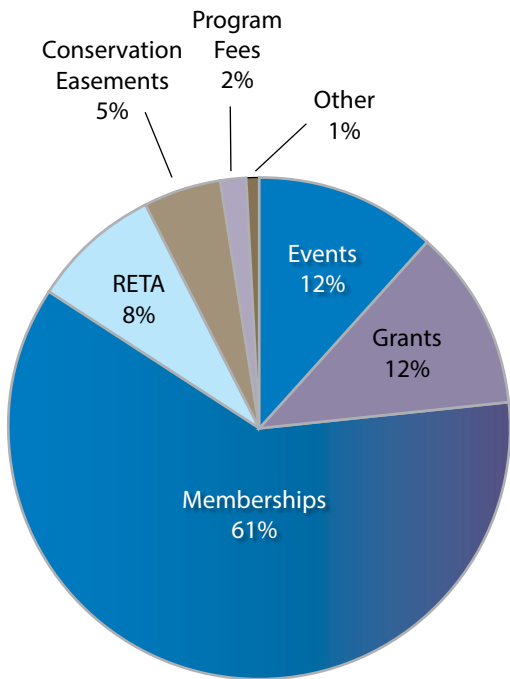
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2020 Financial Summary

2020 OPERATING REVENUES



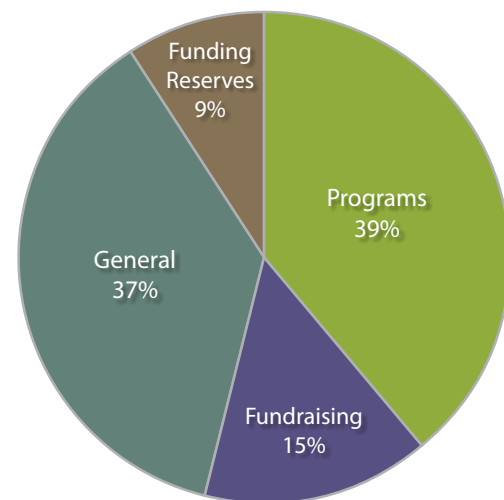
2020 Revenues

Events	\$115,105
Grants	114,907
Memberships	588,500
RETA	77,070
Conservation Easements	44,833
Program Fees	18,869
Other	12,020
Total	\$971,304

2020 OPERATING EXPENSES

2020 Expenses

Programs	\$357,130
Fundraising	136,916
General	338,726
Funding Reserves	80,000
Total	\$912,772



Roaring Fork Conservancy

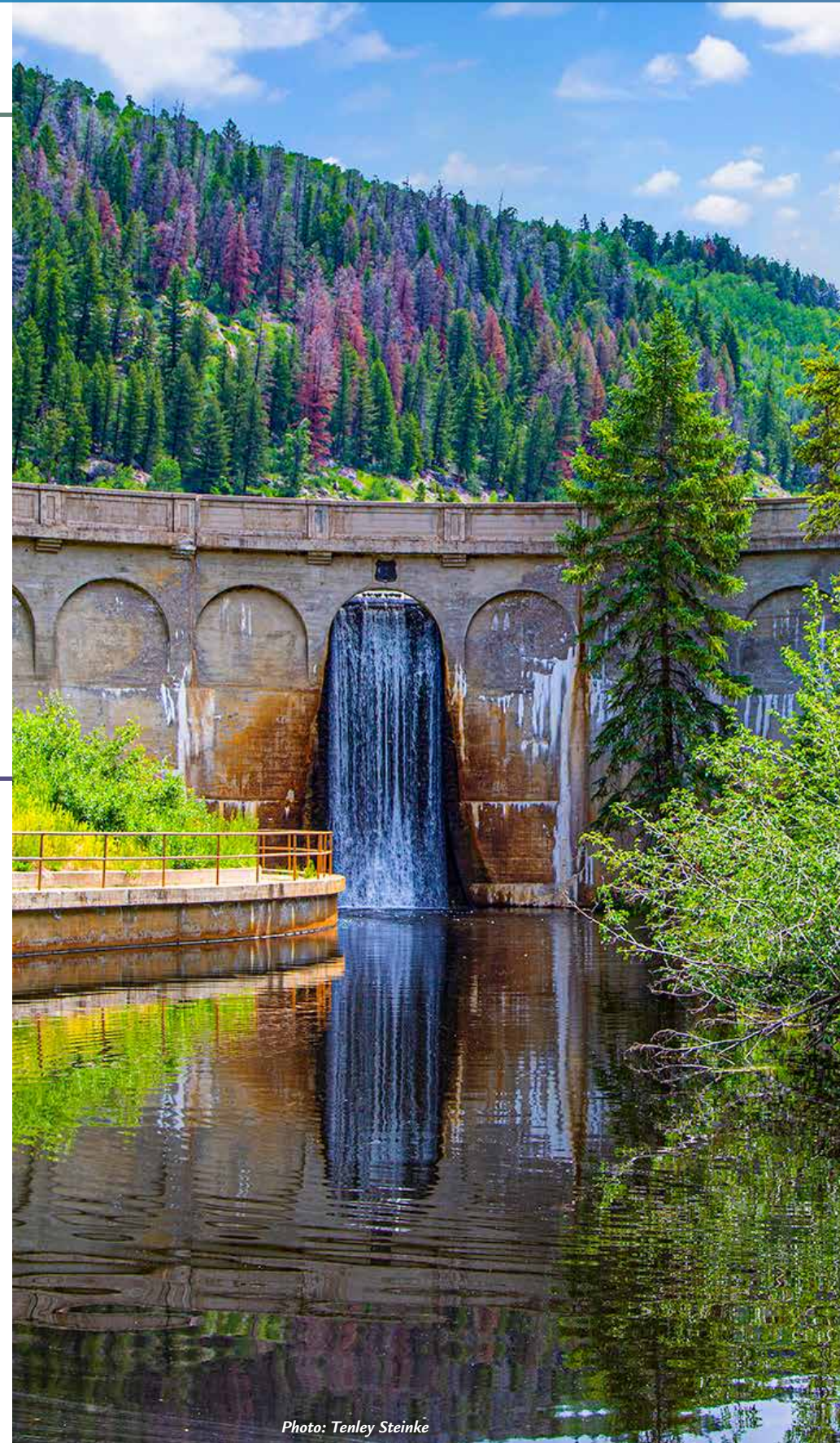


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