

Roaring Fork Watershed Plan Executive Summary 2019

1. Introduction

Water is one of the Roaring Fork Valley's most precious resources. Our communities are connected through our rivers – the Roaring Fork River; Hunter, Castle, and Maroon Creeks; Snowmass, Brush, and Woody Creeks; the Fryingpan River; the Crystal River; Cattle, Four-Mile, and Three-Mile Creeks. Our quality of life is dependent on their many benefits – from world-class rafting to gold-medal fly fishing; from crystal clean drinking water to locally grown beef; epic views up a rolling mountain stream banked by native vegetation, or a historic Colorado ranch.

Water is also one of our most threatened resources. Local rivers are depleted by transmountain diversions, susceptible to pollution, and vulnerable to climate change. The growing state and western population are looking to the over-appropriated Colorado River and its tributaries for relief and future supply. Water demand already surpasses supply and there is no reprieve in the foreseeable future. Creative problem-solving is needed to address uses without historic water rights, such as recreational and environmental flow needs.

More than two-thirds of the surveyed streams in the Roaring Fork watershed have moderately to severely degraded riparian habitat.

Eighty percent of wildlife is dependent on healthy riparian habitats.

Stream-side vegetation also plays an integral role in reducing flooding, increasing base flows during low flow periods, and improving water quality.

If our water resources are not maintained, protected, or enhanced, impacts will be felt by all - instream and riparian habitats, wildlife, recreation and tourism economies,

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“The process started several years ago to bring municipalities and counties together to try to think as a watershed. All decisions were being made with local communities here and counties over there. We made an effort to start thinking as a watershed instead of our own unique municipality or county.”

*– Andrea Holland-Sears
USFS, White River National Forest*



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private wells and public drinking water supplies, and local agriculture. Lower water levels in local streams and rivers will increase water treatment costs as the benefits of dilution decrease. Changes in the management of Ruedi Reservoir could impact the Fryingpan and Roaring Fork Rivers' world class fishery, reduce the availability of flat-water recreation, and impact hydropower production.

In an effort to proactively protect the Roaring Fork Valley's character and resources, local officials, planners, resource managers, and community members came together to form the "Watershed Collaborative"- a group that transcended jurisdictional lines and cooperatively worked to create the Roaring Fork Watershed Plan ("the Plan"). In late 2006, the Ruedi Water and Power Authority (RWAPA), a consortium of governments in the Roaring Fork Valley, engaged Roaring Fork Conservancy (RFC), the local Watershed organization, as the lead consultant in the development of the Plan, which assessed current conditions and recommended goals and actions to benefit the water resource and the valley. In 2012, the completed Plan was approved and adopted as a valley-wide guiding document.

2. Purpose

To plan for and work toward an environmentally and economically healthy watershed that benefits all who have a stake in it.

The Roaring Fork Watershed Plan, originally published in 2012, is the product of over four years of collaboration and effort by more than a hundred people, representing dozens of agencies, governments, and interests throughout the Roaring Fork Valley. It is a compendium of proposals and recommendations developed by both experts and interested citizens, meant to be implemented by a variety of agencies, governments, and other entities, as resources allow. It details more than 250 action items, ranging from identifying and protecting major wetlands to pursuing opportunities for improving natural and artificial water storage as well as improving low stream flows and supporting state and federal tax credits for donations of conservation easements. Action items are intended to provide guidance and direction on how best to cooperatively improve and protect the water resources of the Roaring Fork Valley.

"Proactively understanding the many threats to our watershed in times of changing climate, drought, wildfire and continued population growth throughout Colorado's Front Range and West Slope is a pivotal step to protecting our natural environment, outdoor recreational economy and quality of life. A roadmap to a resilient and sustainable future, the updated Roaring Fork Water Plan is key to identifying immediate improvements that can be made, alerting all of us to actions we can take to protect our water quality, and defending our rivers' and streams' health far into the future."

— Rachel Richards
Aspen City Council and
former Pitkin County
Commissioner

The Plan is divided into three sections:

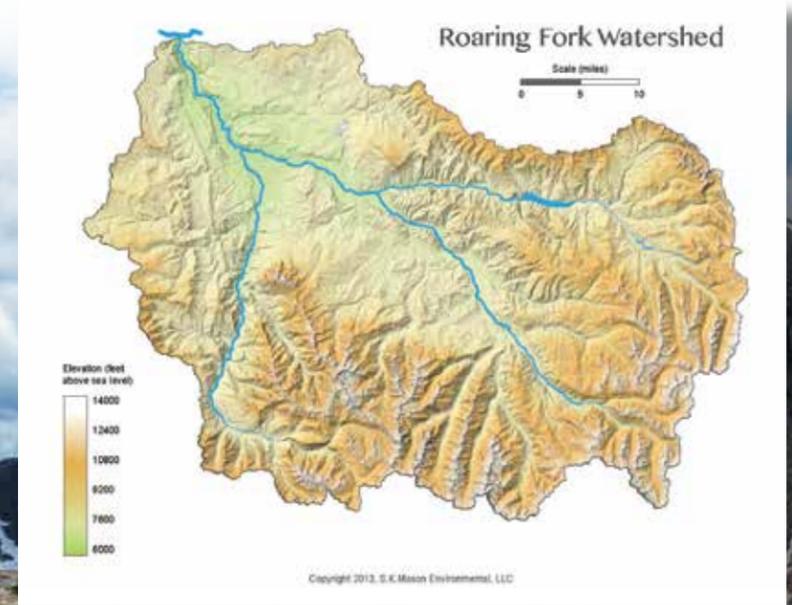
The Narrative section describes the various goals, objectives, and recommended actions according to five broad topic areas: Regional Water Management, Surface Water, Groundwater, Water Quality, and Riparian and Instream Habitat. This extensive overview of goals, objectives, and recommended actions is the basis for matrices that follow. Each action is coded with an alpha-numeric identifier to clarify relationships with other goals, objectives, and actions.

Included with each recommended action are coordinating entities (organizations and local, state, and federal agencies), which may have immediate jurisdiction or influence over the subject of the recommendation, as well as key participants, which may serve as partners or referrals to the coordinating entities. The purpose is to facilitate action and cooperation, not to mandate or oblige implementation upon those entities.

Select actions were identified as "urgent" based on environmental and economic value of the resource to be protected or restored, the threat of future adverse impacts, and the likelihood that actions can be successfully completed in the near term.

The Matrix section arranges the recommendations in a sortable spreadsheet and categorizes them, allowing one to examine the recommendations from several perspectives such as location, key entities, and recommendation type (study, project or regulation).

The Implementation section offers a framework for moving forward and catalogs a variety of resources that can be called upon to assist with implementation in both the short and long term.



Fryingpan Headwaters
Photo: Matt Byers

3. Update and Quick Guides

Throughout 2017 and 2018, with funding from Pitkin County Healthy Rivers Board, RFC met with and interviewed numerous coordinating entities to determine and document projects or actions completed by those organizations that accomplished Plan goals.

Significant accomplishments in the past six years show measurable benefits to the watershed, valuable collaboration, and widespread dedication to the resource. Several key projects have been summarized in Addendum I and are portrayed on a digital interactive map of the watershed available through RFC's website.

Addendum II documents action items added since the original publish date. Action items identified in the 2018 update emphasize work towards stream management planning and agricultural inclusion.

To provide simplicity and clarity for the user, "**Quick Guides**" were created for each coordinating entity listed in the 2012 Plan and for additional stakeholders identified through the process. The Quick Guides include select actions that were categorized by the project team and staff from the coordinating entity as ongoing, particularly important, and/or timely

actions on which the entity could put specific focus in the next few years. Many actions are common to several Quick Guides, especially those germane to local jurisdictions. Some actions were not selected for any Quick Guides – these "orphan" actions were typically found to be daunting, complex actions; untimely or currently lower priority actions; or actions that require specific interest and expertise lacking in the coordinating entities. These actions were kept in the master list and will be periodically revisited.

Quick Guides can be used as a resource when developing short and long-term goals, program or project plans, and budgets. Quick Guides can also be used to inspire projects, identify examples, and suggest potential project partners and funding sources. When an entity begins scoping a project or action identified in the Quick Guide, staff can refer to the recommended action items within the original Plan to gain more information that will assist in preparing objectives, goals, and scopes of work. Additionally, RFC and RWAPA staff can assist in identifying additional resources or partners and to provide a holistic perspective to projects.

4. Next Steps

As was originally intended, the Plan is a dynamic and flexible document to be periodically updated as projects are completed, new information is gathered, and priorities and plans change. During the Watershed Summit of 2018, the attendees requested that RFC and RWAPA work together to foster implementation of the Plan and periodically document progress and updates through Watershed Summits, small group meetings, and individual discussions.

Dedicated to fostering implementation, RFC and RWAPA will continue to serve as resources to participating entities, and check in biannually with stakeholders to promote priority projects, connecting potential partners in action or funding, and celebrate accomplishments. A Roaring Fork watershed summit will be held periodically to bring the larger group of stakeholders together and set priorities moving forward.

Funded by:



 Ruedi Water & Power Authority



ROARING FORK CONSERVANCY

The River Center • 22800 Two Rivers Road • Basalt, CO 81621

www.roaringfork.org • 970.927.1290