

November 2, 2012

The Poudre Runs Through It Study/Action Work Group

SESSION SUMMARY

Revised at 11/13/12 Based on group feedback

Standing on the banks of the Poudre behind Tamasag looking for clues about the river's health was a highlight of our second session. Two of our participants, Brian Bledsoe and John Sanderson, shared their river ecology expertise with us, including:

We live in a managed system. Humans are a big part. It's not always helpful to talk about what's "natural". Recommended flows are more important than natural flows. The Poudre River has diverse personalities; different solutions are needed for different parts of the river.

The river's flows are the maestro of the orchestra. Of concern is:

- 1) Magnitude: How big are flow events?
- 2) Timing: When do flow events come?
- 3) Frequency: How often do flow events come?
- 4) Duration: How long do flow events last?
- 5) Rate of change: How fast do the flows change through time?

Variability of the hydrograph is a given—and variability is good.

Various stages are needed to create a food buffet for trout and other critters.

Timing is important. Some trout lay eggs in the fall. If the river bed is dry or frozen then, they don't survive.

Algae in a river is normal. The question is "how much?"

Too much algae is a symptom of eutrophication and/or insufficient scouring, and may worsen water quality.

Eutrophication affects aesthetics, water quality, and habitat for insects.

With too much algae, mayflies, stoneflies, and caddis flies leave—affecting everything up the food chain.

Greenback cutthroat trout, native to the Poudre, are no longer viable there.

Now we manage for brown trout—which are actually from Germany!

Day to day management of the river for human uses has ecological consequences.

For instance, fish can get stranded with abrupt flow changes. As ditch companies retrofit their diversion structures, could they make them fish friendly? There are tangible policy decisions and management options that could make a difference.

Plains cottonwoods have a hard time reproducing in our current flow regime. In recent years, green ash has done well. Should we care? That's a complicated, values-driven question. There are lots of variables to think about. Cottonwoods form cavities – we have lots of cavity nesters like flickers.

The river over time has been straightened out in many of the reaches below the canyon mouth.

There are places where we could let it wiggle around—reconnect it to its floodplain.

What we have is an invented river ecosystem. That's not necessarily bad.

River restoration is a big experiment. Instead of building—or rebuilding—habitats, we should aim to restore processes to the river that allow it to create its own new habitats.

Earlier in the day, we shared our visions homework with one another. Here are some points and questions that came out of the exercise (read the full package of homework for details):

How do we make water work more like land—to use the market to fund things for the public at large?

We need to collectively understand: what is a healthy river?

We could broaden traditional ideas of yield/productivity of the river to include environmental aspects.

Don't shoot for perfection. Start simple.

Can be both practical and principled at the same time.

Important to look at the river from a social perspective—what does it mean to all of us?

Common language—we should build on that.

Man's interaction with the river hasn't been all negative.

Educating the community is critical.

The river is a system in need of fine tuning/tweaking—not an overhaul.

Have to work within framework of a limited resource.

Honor history without being bound by it.

A lot of collective actions precede us, lots of problem solving, initiative and a sense of willfulness.

We should look to others who have dealt with these issues. Inspired by Great Lakes water management.

We should build consensus about what a river needs and how to make it doable.

We need to identify if there are water laws that may need some change to accomplish what we want.

Significant character of the community will be lost if we don't take care of the river.

Our sense of place is undeniably connected to agriculture.

Would like to see us manage our values so we don't lose our sense of place.

Let's listen, understand, look at the facts, and define reasonable goals.

Questions and suggestions that came out of the session:

What will constitute success of this group, not just next June, but beyond?

Let's put the various relevant Loomis studies on our website.

Let's ask DDA and Link N Greens to make presentations.

Our discussion about what hats we wear:

Are we representing certain groups or are we simply representing ourselves as individuals? We discussed this question and decided that the answer varies from person to person. In some cases, we must wear the hat of the organization for which we work, such as the City of Fort Collins. In other cases, we may be on the board of directors of an organization such as Save the Poudre but we do not have the authority (or the intent) to speak for the group. We decided that what is most important is that we, as individuals, are associated with a wide diversity of groups with interest in the Poudre—and that among us we have membership in all the major groups with such interest.

We decided to try the following “hat” approach:

List participants by name and profession/workplace.

Then, after this list, we will list all the relevant organizations to which we belong, not specifying which of us belongs to which group. In addition, we will keep a list of organizations/individuals that presented to us during group sessions, so that it will be clear that we gained input from a diversity of perspectives.

How do we want to view survey results?

Beth Plombon's survey yielded insights and information about the group that should be helpful for us going forward. Though survey responses are anonymous, individual comments might be recognizable as belonging to a given person because we are such a small group. No one in the group appears to be uncomfortable with that (we know what each other is thinking anyway, someone pointed out), so we will send everyone a copy of the raw data from the survey, including comments.

The website will go live this month.

Everyone is asked to take a look at the website and give us pointers for information that should be added under the Resources section, and any additional websites of Poudre-interested organizations we should provide links to.

Our December 14 session will feature the "working river."

George Varra, our participant who is the former Poudre River commissioner, will help us understand river administration and management. We will also hear from our urban and agricultural participants about how they interact with the river commissioner as they divert from the river. In addition, we will hear from Larry Hicks of the Little Snake River Conservation District in south central Wyoming, who has an inspiring story to tell about their challenges and successes creating multiple benefit for agriculture and the environment on the Snake River.

Homework for the December Session will be announced by November 10!

At the end of the November session, we discussed several different ideas for how we might proceed in our deliberations and whether it was time to begin looking at specific proposals for improvements we might investigate for the river. The group agreed to allow the steering committee to wrestle with this question and send out the homework following their November 9 meeting. Stay tuned!