

South Platte River Urban Waters Partners (SPRUWP)
August 17, 2021, 1 pm – 3 pm
Virtual Meeting
Quarterly Meeting Summary – FINAL

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Areti Athanasopoulos, Josh Baker, Barry Burch Jr., Amy Conklin, Rachel Crouch, Stacey Eriksen, Sherry Fountain, Guadalupe Herrera, David Howlett, Joshua Laipply, Mike McHugh, Jeff Medaugh, Brian Murphy, Patrick O’Connell, Jordan Parman, Ericka Pilcher, Marge Price, David Rausch, Gene Reetz, Gordon Robertson, Donny Roush, Travis Warziniack, Jennifer Williams, Ben Wise, and Joe Zell

Facilitation: Samuel Wallace and Izzy Sofio

ACTION ITEMS

Stacey Eriksen	Determine whether SPRUWP can sign an MOU of support for USACE projects.
David Howlett	Provide additional information about how SPRUWP partners can support the USACE projects to Samuel Wallace
Jordan Parman	Provide more information regarding MWRD’s name change to Samuel Wallace in the coming weeks.
Guadalupe Herrera	Coordinate with the partnership within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services planning a climate change and environmental justice workshop to gauge their interest in hearing a presentation on the USACE projects.
SPRUWP Partners	Notify Samuel Wallace with additional questions or thoughts about the USACE presentation.
Samuel Wallace	Distribute additional information about how SPRUWP partners can support the USACE projects.

PARTNER UPDATES

Meeting participants shared introductions and provided relevant updates. Below are key points from the updates.

Barr Lake and Milton Reservoir Watershed Association

The 2021 Urban Water Cycle Bike Tour video is complete and online (find it [here](#)). There is an upcoming opportunity to participate in the Urban Water Cycle Educator Appreciation ride.

Metro Wastewater Reclamation District (MWRD)

MWRD will change its name on September 1 to Metro Water Recovery. In the coming weeks, Jordan Parman, MWRD, will share more information regarding the organization’s name change with Samuel Wallace, Peak Facilitation Group.

City of Denver Public Works

- Earlier in August, Denver Public Works, in partnership with Denver Water, hosted the fifth annual Denver Watershed Workshop for teachers in the Denver area.
- The Denver MS4 stormwater permits are certified now, ending any disputes and lawsuits related to the new permit.

- The City of Denver Public Works started writing eleven planning documents for the MS4 stormwater permit. Donny Roush will write the Education and Outreach plan document, which has not been updated since 2009.

Other Updates

- The Colorado General Assembly's Interim Committees, Wildfire Matters Review Committee and Water Resources Review Committee, are now in session. For updates and scheduling information related to these committees, follow these links: [Wildfire Matters Review Committee](#) and [Water Resources Review Committee](#).
- The Colorado Water Congress Summer Conference will be from August 24 to August 26 in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

SPRUWP Committees

- The Education and Outreach Committee met on the morning of August 17. During the meeting, SPRUWP partners met with the Lincoln Hills Cares Pollution Reduction Youth Committee and learned about their efforts and initiatives.
- The Science and Data Committee is working on preproposals to receive funding from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and local matching funding for a few projects. One project is to install a super gage along the South Platte River to gather water quality data, and another project is to conduct geomorphological assessments of the South Platte River.
- If anyone would like to join either Committee, they can reach out to Samuel Wallace.

Rocky Mountain Land Library

- The Rocky Mountain Land Library has close ties to the South Platte through three sites. First is the facility at Buffalo Peaks Ranch along the banks of the Middle Fork of the South Platte in South Park, second is the Kids and Educators Library at Denver Water's Kassler site by Waterton Canyon, and third is the Globeville Library along the South Platte in metro Denver. This provides a unique "Headwaters to Plains" perspective on the South Platte.
- In the past, the organization was volunteer based but recently made the switch to paid staff.
- The Executive Director, Jeff Lee, will reach out with more information about the organization and its work as the Rocky Mountain Library is new to SPRUWP.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS SOUTH PLATTE RIVER ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECTS PRESENTATION

Members of the Denver Mayor's Office, Denver Parks and Recreation Department, the City and County of Denver, and Capitol Representatives, including Barry Burch Jr., Gordon Robertson, Joshua Laipply, Jennifer Williams, David Howlett, and Marge Price, shared a presentation about the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) ecosystem restoration projects on the South Platte River. Below are key points from the presentation.

Overview

- The South Platte River and Tributaries Colorado Project was authorized in the 2020 Water Resources Development Act, which passed and was signed into law in December 2020. The projects received support from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), the USACE, the U.S. House of Representatives (House) and U.S. Senate (Senate) Authorization Appropriations Committees, Colorado's congressional delegations, and the Denver community.
- Denver's USACE projects address national ecosystem restoration goals, flood risk management, climate resilience, economic recovery, environmental justice, and environmental education goals.

- Denver Mayor Michael Hancock testified before the Senate Committee on the Environment and Public Works to express the need for federal and local support regarding Denver's infrastructure, including water in the South Platte River. The Mayor fully supports these projects and would like to see these projects through during his last term.
- The South Platte River and Tributaries Colorado Project includes three areas: 1) six and a half miles of the South Platte River from around Phil Milstein Park to 58th Avenue in Commerce City, 2) three and a half miles from the Weir Gulch South Platte River confluence, which is collocated to Denver Housing Authority's Public Project and Sun Valley, upstream towards Sheridan Boulevard, and 3) three miles from the Harvard Gulch confluence running east to Colorado Boulevard.
- The second project is the Southern Platte Valley 1135 CAP project, which covers two and four-tenths miles from West Yale Avenue downstream to West Mississippi Avenue.

Project Estimates and Funding Information

- The construction funding needs, broken down respectively by federal, local, and total cost for the South Platte River and Tributaries, Adams and Denver Counties, Colorado Project, are \$344 million, \$206 million, and \$550 million.
- The construction funding needs, broken down respectively by federal, local, and total cost for the Southern Platte Valley Ecosystem Sec. 1135 CAP Project, are \$9 million, \$3 million, and \$12 million.
- The Southern Platte Valley 1135 CAP project is authorized and is currently in the project design stage. There is funding in line for the project. The South Platte River and Tributaries Project was awarded approval of federal funding, but that funding has not yet been appropriated. Commitment to the project, collaboration, and providing proof that a project can acquire the required local match are all important steps in getting federal funding appropriated.
- There are a few local funding streams that may help the project reach its local match. For example, on the 2018 ballot, a deburring initiative for the Mile High Flood District (MHFD) increased their available funds through the mill levies by about 44 percent. Additionally, another 2018 ballot initiative established a sales tax that directs revenue to parks, waterways, open spaces, and trails. Additionally, the City and County of Denver's (CCD) general funds and enterprise funds for infrastructure and general funds throughout the city could also contribute to the local match.
- Originally, the USACE plan for the South Platte River and Tributaries Project asked for \$400 thousand, but the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) removed that ask from the plan.
- The earmarking process has proven to be a successful tool for this project. Senator John Hickenlooper, Senator Michael Bennet, and Representative Dianna DeGette placed an earmark of \$400k for pre-construction engineering and design (PED) for the South Platte River and Tributaries Project.
- Any additional support from agencies and organizations in SPRUWP and SPRUWP itself will help this project get appropriation from the federal government, more local matches, state funds, and grants, whether that support is financial or conceptual.
- There is a memorandum of understanding (MOU) under negotiation with the USACE and The River Mile Project. The River Mile Project involves building a mile along the South Platte River and addressing some of the ecosystem restoration work that the USACE would also like to see in the same corridor of the South Platte River. Ultimately, the goal of the MOU would be to include the River Mile Project under the scope of the USACE's project so that the projects can receive the same amount of funding while also incorporating the efforts of the River Mile Project. Incorporating the River Mile Project in the scope would decrease the mileage that the USACE project would be responsible for while receiving the same amount of funding.

Draft MOU Outreach

- The presenters have a draft MOU they would like to pass out for signatures to as many people and organizations as possible to support the project.
- These projects are the only projects in the USACE plan that have authorization for ecosystem restoration and flood hazard mitigation.

Similar Projects

- In the City of Denver, Confluence Park and 39th Greenway are similar projects to these USACE projects.
- The Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan in Los Angeles, California, has several similarities to the South Platte River. Unlike the Los Angeles River, the South Platte River does not have concrete-lined channels. However, the South Platte River has seen a great deal of industrial use. Additionally, both projects had/have the shared goal of providing more outdoor recreational space to communities in the area.
- The Menomonee River Project in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was another ecosystem restoration project similar to the proposed projects in the South Platte River.
- The River Mile Project intends to restore the ecosystem and activate the area with river space. Some cities across the country, like San Antonio, Texas, have developed their cities to coincide with the natural ecosystem. That is one of the main objectives of these projects.
- These projects will narrow and deepen the South Platte River while creating wider banks for the wetlands and wildlife.

National Significance of the South Platte River and Tributaries Project

- The South Platte River and Tributaries, Adams and Denver Counties, Colorado Project is a nationally significant project. For one reason, it is a migratory flyway for birds. Additionally, the Bear Creek, Cherry Creek, and Chatfield Dams disrupt the river's water flow so that the wetlands and wildlife do not have as much water as they need.
- This plan will create 160 acres of wetland habitat and riparian corridor, 100 acres of wetland habitat, and will connect 190 acres of existing habitat. Additionally, the project will increase vegetated wetland habitat from one percent to six and a half percent of the landmass within the city.

Flood Risk Management

- Weir Gulch is located near the Sun Valley neighborhood. Currently, Weir Gulch would flood the Sun Valley neighborhood during a 100-year flood. This project will protect this neighborhood from flooding. The plan also addresses environmental justice concerns. The plan will remove 360 structures from the flood plain that would otherwise pay flood insurance.
- Harvard Gulch is also a flood improvement project. The plan will not remove structures from this area but will modify 176 structures to mitigate the impacts of flooding.
- Lastly, the plan will remove 100 structures along the South Platte River within areas that are at risk of flooding during a 100-year flood event while also creating wider banks for ecosystem restoration.

Recently Completed Projects

- Throughout the implementation of the South Platte River Vision Implementation Plan (RVIP), The City and County of Denver established 19 funding partnerships and received \$90 million in local investment.

- RVIP led to the Sanderson Gulch Channel Improvements, which removed approximately 100 structures out of the flood plain and cost \$20 million. Grant Frontier Park, also under RVIP, was completed in the spring of 2017 and cost \$3.75 million.
- The Chatfield Reallocation Project, completed in 2020, provides 20,600 acre-feet of additional water storage, which benefits nearby farmers and agricultural producers and established 2,100 acre-feet of aquatic and riparian habitat in the South Platte River.
- The Platte to Park Hill: Stormwater System project combined four projects that created the City Park Golf Course, Globeville Landing, 39th Avenue Greenway, and Park Hill Detention. The total cost of these projects was \$298 million, and the projects planted 400 trees, created a mile-long greenway, and a wetland stream channel with parks along the edge. This project beautified a drainage project and created space for the people of Denver to connect with the South Platte River.

Projects Currently Underway

Other projects underway in Denver County with similar objectives include Carpio-Sanguinette Park, Globeville Stormwater Systems, National Western, Sun Valley EcoDistrict, Weir Gulch Channel Improvements, and complementary development.

Southern Platte Valley Sec. 1135 Project Significance

- This project connects three previously completed RVIP projects. It will be adjacent to the \$20 million investment at the outfall of Sanderson Gulch.
- Through improvements and expansion to the riverbed, this project will create eleven acres of riparian habitat, 22 acres of aquatic habitat, and 1.5 acres of Palustrine emergent scrub/shrub wetlands.
- This project is currently under the design process and should enter the construction phases next year.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS SOUTH PLATTE RIVER ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECTS CLARIFYING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Meeting participants discussed the presentation.

Support and Endorsement

- The big ask is for SPRUWP partners and/or SPRUWP to sign on to the MOU and show their support of the projects.
- Samuel Wallace can distribute the MOU to SPRUWP partners who are interested in signing the MOU or having their member organizations sign the MOU.
- It is not clear at this time whether SPRUWP could sign the MOU. SPRUWP is not a non-profit or individual organization, and several of the partner organizations are federal entities.
- SPRUWP does have an endorsement process that could be applied to this situation, which falls under the jurisdiction of the SPRUWP Advisory Committee. Additionally, Stacey Eriksen, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), will investigate whether SPRUWP can sign an MOU as a group.
- Some SPRUWP partners need to research whether their agencies and organizations could sign an MOU too.
- The project did receive clearance from the EPA through the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) review, which is one level of endorsement from a federal agency.

Technical and Political Timeline

- If the project receives \$400 thousand this October, it would be likely that funds could be used around late December.

- The design process can move forward
- With Senator Hickenlooper's and Senator Bennet's strong ties to the City and County of Denver, it would be a missed opportunity to not leverage their support to receive the \$350 million allocation from the federal government. In order to leverage the Senator's connection to the Denver area, it is crucial to prove that it is possible to get the local and state matches.
- Project work needs to happen in the next year before the last year of Mayor Hancock's term to acquire local and state matches.
- It would be helpful if SPRUWP partners could write and send letters of support for the project in the near term. Letters of support will help communicate to the USACE, the OMB, the Colorado Congressional delegation, the Appropriations Committees in the House and Senate, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) that there is local, regional, and state support for this project. This is the main motivation behind the MOU. David Howlett, Capitol Representatives, will notify Samuel Wallace with specific requests for letters. Additionally, the MOU will help the project acquire grant funding.
- There are several projects that the USACE approved over the years that have not been completed. There is a substantial backlog in funding for these projects (\$96 million). There is about \$11 billion to address the funding backlog in the House Appropriations Bill.

Clarifying Question

Meeting participants had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the presentation. Below the question is indicated in italics, and the corresponding answer is in plain text.

What is the total cost of the project? There are several projects with associated funding asks in the Denver area, and these projects essentially compete for funding.

These projects will receive funding from different funding mechanisms based in Washington D.C. versus within or from the State of Colorado. The USACE receives funding from House and Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Committees.

Clarifying Discussion

- Rather than competing for state funding sources for projects throughout Colorado, it could be productive for all the entities and organizations focused on water-related projects and ecosystem restoration to communicate and establish a way to work and solve these problems together. There could be a way for groups and projects to come together across the state to establish a coordinated message to support these projects and this work.
- The total funding coming out of Washington might be creating tension in various federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and in some members on the other side of the aisle that have not historically received funding for watershed-related and ecosystem restoration-related project work. Colorado's watershed provides water to nineteen states. Water and ecosystem restoration projects in Colorado impact more than just the State of Colorado or the City and County of Denver.
- It may be possible to incorporate additional funding for work in different departments into these USACE projects through the leverage that the U.S. Government already approved this project. If it is possible to show that it is efficient to include other projects or funding needs under this work's scope, then additional funding could be generated for other projects or work.
- The USACE projects have received bipartisan support.
- There will soon be development in the Sun Valley area that might be a funding resource for this project. It should be considered who this project will benefit. If Sun Valley becomes expensive and brings in higher-income individuals into the area, then the project may not have the same environmental justice outcomes it sets out to achieve.

- There is a partnership within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which plans to put on a climate change and environmental justice workshop in early spring of next year. Guadalupe Herrera has a connection to this group which may serve as a beneficial opportunity for this project's outreach. She can reach out to the group to see if they would be interested in hearing a presentation about these projects.
- This presentation should include some data on carbon sequestration. Additionally, the presentation could highlight the project's environmental justice efforts, such as the eight-acre park near the Sun Valley neighborhood that will reach phase one next year.

Next Steps

- David Howlett will provide additional information about how SPRUWP partners can support the USACE projects to Samuel Wallace. Samuel Wallace, Peak Facilitation Group, will follow up with SPRUWP partners with information from David Howlett.
- The SPRUWP Advisory Committee will consider endorsing these projects. The SPRUWP Advisory Committee will begin the process of endorsing the projects, and Stacey Eriksen will investigate whether SPRUWP as an entity can sign the MOU of support.

SPRUWP STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

Samuel Wallace provided information about the SPRUWP strategic planning efforts and the Strategic Planning Committee. Below are key points from his update.

Overview

- The purpose of a strategic plan is to provide SPRUWP with a clear direction for the future while still providing space for partners to implement projects autonomously.
- Over the last few months, SPRUWP partners participated in a strategic planning survey designed to gauge SPRUWP partners' interest in the strategic planning process. This effort led to the formation of a Strategic Planning Committee.
- The SPRUWP strategic plan will be a "roadmap" and not a "detailed itinerary."
- The Strategic Planning Committee includes representatives from Denver Trout Unlimited, Westervelt Ecological Services, Barr Lake and Milton Reservoir Watershed Association, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado State Forest Service, the U.S. Forest Service, South Platte River Waterkeeper, Colorado Watershed Assembly, Denver Water, and One World, One Water Center.
- At the first meeting on August 4, Committee members reaffirmed the SPRUWP mission, reviewed SPRUWP strategic planning survey results, and conducted a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.
- The Committee will meet two or three more times, review SPRUWP's high-level goals, develop measurable outcomes for each goal, and organize the information into one document for SPRUWP partners to easily access.

Clarifying Question

Meeting participants had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the SPRUWP strategic planning process. The question is below in italics, and the corresponding answer is in plain text.

Does the SPRUWP mission encompass the upper parts of the watershed?

Yes.

NEXT STEPS

- At the next quarterly SPRUWP meeting in November, SPRUWP partners will hear a presentation from the Rocky Mountain Land Library and/or presentations from the Science and Data Committee.
- Denver Water and Aurora Water might present a sediment reduction study in the Upper South Platte River by the next meeting. Mike McHugh and Samuel Wallace can coordinate this before the next meeting.