

South Platte River Urban Waters Partnership (SPRUWP)
May 16, 2023, 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM
Zoom Meeting
Quarterly Meeting Summary – FINAL

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Cailyn Andrews, Juliana Archuleta, Matt Ashley, Audrey Miles- Cherney, Amy Conklin, Casey Davenhill, Stacey Eriksen, Skip Feeney, Erin Fernandez, Guadalupe Herrera, Greg McGrath, Jordan Parman, Teresa Patterson, Brian Tietze, and Abigail Wright

Presenters: Zoe Hall and Quin Holifield

Facilitation: Dominique Ashe and Samuel Wallace

ACTION ITEMS

Samuel Wallace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distribute Healthy River Corridors Study to SPRUWP members• Confirm if any projects or ideas related to urban forestry resulted from the SPRUWP Funding Workshop this past January.
Greg McGrath	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reach out to Jordan Parman to discuss previous heat mitigation projects.
Zoe Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share hiring opportunities with SPRUWP members.

PARTNER INTRODUCTIONS AND UPDATES

Meeting participants introduced themselves and provided updates on the work of the organizations that they represent. Their comments are summarized below.

Metro Water Recovery

Metro Water Recovery will soon initiate Phase 5 of its instream habitat improvement projects. The project will enhance fish habitat between Denver and Brighton.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

- EPA recently hired an intern who will begin next week. The intern will work full time over the summer and then remotely throughout the fall. The intern’s focus is on urban waters and green infrastructure.
- The EPA SPRUWP webpage will be updated later this week.
- The City of Denver signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Army Corps of Engineers the week prior, establishing a partnership that will focus on restoration along the South Platte River.

Colorado Watershed Assembly

The Colorado Watershed Assembly will co-host the Sustaining Colorado Watersheds Conference in October. They are currently accepting submissions for abstracts through May 25.

South Platte River Healthy River Corridor Study

A group of partners in Denver have recently released the *South Platte River Healthy River Corridor Study*. Samuel Wallace, Peak Facilitation Group, will distribute the draft copy of the study to SPRUWP partners.

Water Education Colorado (WeCO)

- WeCO will be hosting its upcoming annual river basin tour on the Yampa-White-Green Reiver. The tour dates are June 6 and 7, 2023, and the registration is open. Participants will learn about cultural sites and river characteristics and visit municipal sites on the tour.
- WeCO will be a host institution for Project WET (Water Education Today), in partnership with Aurora Water, to teach K-12 students a water curriculum.

Aurora Water

- Matt Ashley was hired as the new Water Resources Senior Project Manager Specialist, a position previously held by Mike McHugh.
- Aurora Water is focused on finalizing the organization's first Source Water Protection Plan. For Aurora Water, this plan is a major milestone in their watershed health program. The Source Water Protection *Plan* is different than Aurora Water's Source Water Protection *Program* in that the plan specifies actions in the next 5-10 years and makes Aurora Water eligible for different grant programs. Stacey Eriksen, EPA, can upload the new plan to the SPRUWP website once it is finalized.
- Aurora Water is drafting grant applications for the Bureau of Reclamation to install new wells as the organizations' north campus has seen flooding in their wells and gravel pits during recent rains.

Water Quality Control Division at Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

The Water Quality Control Division recently finished a list of impaired water in the Upper and Lower Colorado River basins as well as the Arkansas and Rio Grande Basins. The Division is now focusing on updating the list of impaired waters for the South Platte River. They are currently working on consolidating the South Platte River data, and over the next two years, the Division will reach out to SPRUWP members to gather data and assess water quality in the South Platte.

Denver Department of Public Health and Environment (DDPHE)

DDPHE is implementing their routine monitoring for streams and rivers. The water levels are high at Cherry Creek. DDPHE will also soon develop a best management practices guide for stream and river projects.

Adams County Stormwater Division

- The Adams County Stormwater Division is currently working on the Denver Public Works MS4 permit.
- The agency is currently patrolling flooding, which at this time of year absorbs most of the work hours of the stormwater division.
- Last year the stormwater division partnered with Lincoln Hills Care for a pilot education project, which will reoccur this year.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

- The HUD is offering special resources for non-profit organizations, including grants. The funding is largely coming from the Inflation Reduction Act, but the exact grant programs are still uncertain.
- HD is working with the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on a farm-to-school program and an overall focus on bringing food to rural and urban areas.
- HUD has a new Colorado Field Office Director, Mercedes Maestas, who might join the SPRUWP meetings.

- HUD staff is focused on re-establishing basic agency functions such as customer service. This function has been hindered by COVID and other threats to agency offices. Another pressure the agency is facing is the high number of people experiencing homelessness.

CDM Smith

CDM Smith is the consultant working on the design of the US Army Corps of Engineers South Platte Restoration Projects. The design concept for the first reach of the river is at a 60% completion. The project design will mitigate heat impacts to improve fish habitat.

Groundwork Denver

Ground Work Denver will implement its Green Infrastructure Program (GRIT), which will connect youth to career pathways related to green infrastructure.

Upper South Platte Partnership (USPP)

- The USPP is a collaborative effort that brings together active forest managers in the Upper South Platte Watershed to network and share best management practices, events, and other resources. The organizations and agencies involved include the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), Denver Water, local fire protection districts, Aurora Water, and several others focused on protecting drinking water quality in the Upper South Platte Watershed.
- The USPP will host an upcoming field tour. During the field tour, partners will visit three project sites, two of which are completed and one active, and meet the forest managers involved with the projects.
- The USPP is split into three subgroups, one of which is the Engagement, Communication and Outreach (ECO) Team. The USPP ECO Team is currently in the process of refining their structures and protocols.
- The USPP will host an intern this summer from the Colorado State University Warner College of Natural Resources.

LAND LIFE COMPANY PRESENTATION

Zoe Hall, Land Life Company Reforestation Project Manager of North America, presented the organization's objectives, impact, and opportunities to collaborate. Her presentation is summarized below.

- Land Life Company is a for-profit company with a mission to help restore the world's two million acres of degraded land. Degraded lands include deforestation, wildfires, over-farming, global-warming, urbanization, and disease. Land Life Company's efforts to restore degraded land include planting trees, restoring nature, working with local communities, and offering technical services.
- Land Life is a global organization with offices in Spain, Portugal, Australia, and Iceland, among others. In the USA, Land Life has an office in Sacramento, CA with intentions to grow across the nation. The North American branch focused on their strategic planning process to expand into new regions, including the Rocky Mountains (CO, WY and NM). Land Life Company is B-Corp certified.
- Example projects areas in Colorado include the Spring Creek Fire burn scar, Durango-Mancos area, and the East Troublesome Fire burn scar. In 2021, Land Life restored 600 of forests, and in 2022, they restored 1,200 acres. They intend to restore another 1,500 acres this season. Land Life Company aims to annually restore 4,000 acres.
- Land Life Company reaches out to landowners and visits sites to gauge the natural restoration ability of the land when starting on a new project. Additionally, Land Life Company offers hardware (e.g., Cocoon) to facilitate seed establishment and software

products focused on designing and monitoring. Furthermore, Land Life Company supports financial implementation for projects by securing funds through climate markets, such as carbon markets, and potentially biodiversity markets, which value restoring nature and air quality.

- In Colorado, Land Life Company collaborates with operations partners such as Ecoculture, who are affiliates of Northern Arizona University, GE Forestry and a number of nurseries. Additionally, Adams State University established an internship program promoting green career opportunities for students who monitor Land Life Company projects. Land Life Company supplies funding towards seedlings, labor, monitoring, and support technology, such as drones, monitoring apps. and databases. The organization also has the capacity to quantify carbon capture, while their interest in other metrics and markets grows (e.g., water quality).
- Looking ahead, Land Life Company is interested in seeking partners who can:
 - Provide access to land before, during, and after restoration projects
 - Commit to long-term management plans (e.g., 40-year lease terms)
 - Commit to restoration efforts and/or provide carbon leases.
- When considering a partner, Land Life Company weighs land criteria valuations (e.g. planting native species and landscape level impacts) and opportunities for engaging local communities. An example of a partnership that Land Life Company previously formed is with Zalando, a European-based company. Land Life Company collaborated with Zalando's sustainability team to develop portfolios focused on achieving aggressive net-zero targets. This is exemplary of Land Life Company's vetting process for partners and diligence of assessing sustainability plans to identify where Land Life Company can offset (e.g., carbon) through their projects.
- Land Life Company communicates their project impacts through Sia, a reforestation dashboard, to show potential and existing project funding sources and implementers the successes.

Clarifying Questions

SPRUWP partners asked Zoe Hall several clarifying questions. Questions are in italics, and corresponding responses are in plain text.

Where does Land Life Company source your forest tree seeds?

Land Life Company works with local seed collectors. Currently, the seeds are collected regionally and then moved to different nurseries, one as far as Oregon. Land Life Company aims to eventually source and grow seedlings all in the same region as well as grow at larger scales (e.g., 4,000 seedlings). Land Life Company is currently working with the US Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station to look at climate adapted species and analyze models to determine future climate scenarios.

How does Land Life Company manage for wildfire? Does the company include terms in contracts in wildfire prone areas? Do you space tree plantings to mitigate future wildfires?

Land Life Company intentionally leaves spacing between trees for this purpose and follows forest management plans relevant to the area. Land Life Company additionally provides landowners support by covering financial costs for developing a forest management plan and collaborates with forest management agencies, like the Colorado State Forest Service.

USDA - INFRASTRUCTURE REDUCTION ACT FUNDING FOR URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY

Quin Holifield, National Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager at U.S. Forest Service (USFS), presented upcoming funding opportunities for urban and community forestry through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Her presentation is summarized below.

- The USFS Urban and Community Forest Program funding opportunities are designed to direct funding to communities with little-to-no green spaces, tree canopies, and/or where dead and hazardous tree conditions exist.
- A USDA Notice of Funding Opportunity recently announced \$1 billion for urban and community forestry in the form of competitive grants, cooperative agreements, and technological assistance. The minimum funding request amount is set to \$100,000, while the maximum is set to \$50 million. Funding must be used within a five-year period after being awarded. The eligibility for these grant awards includes state agencies, local entities, agencies of insular areas, federally recognized tribes, non-profit organizations, community-based organizations (including faith-based organizations), and publicly controlled institutions (e.g., universities).
- Any application must be submitted electronically before June 1, 2023, 11:59PM Eastern Time through the Inflation Reduction Act – Community Forestry Grant Application Portal. There is a FAQ currently uploaded online.

Clarifying Questions

SPRUWP partners asked Quin Holifield follow-up questions about the IRA funding for urban and community forestry. Their questions are in italics, and corresponding answers are in plain text.

Is the USDA looking for any specific types of projects?

As a generalization, the USDA is looking for cooperative urban and community forestry projects that mitigate heat island effects, create workforce opportunities, and/or address tribal challenges (e.g., targets identified in the Justice40 Initiative by the Biden/Harris administration). The more specific an application is regarding the plan to plant and then maintain trees, the stronger the application will be. Additionally, the USDA wants to understand what funding the applicants plan on using to sustain any projects after the five-year grant award period ends. Lastly, a more competitive grant will effectively tell the story of how the funds will benefit the community.

Does this grant require an in-kind or dollar-for-dollar match?

Applications require a dollar-for-dollar match with non-federal funding. Match waivers are available for proposals that deliver 100% of the funding/program benefits to disadvantaged communities. There are additional details in the FAQ on funding matches.

Can grant funds be allocated towards drainage systems (e.g., crated systems for roots to expand below trees)?

Silviculture construction is not available for through this grant. However, the grant can go towards purchasing crates, just not for construction. There are other grant opportunities (e.g., transportation grants) that could be an opportunity to pay for construction.

Can projects under the \$100,000 funding minimum apply?

Yes, the USDA encourages all applications, even those under the \$100,000 minimum.

Discussion of USDA Urban Forestry Grant

Samuel Wallace, Peak Facilitation Group, asked the SPURWP members if anyone considered applying to this funding opportunity. Group member's response are summarized below.

- The City of Littleton has a historic area known for Honey locust. Over time, the community funded a tree canopy study with a focus on environmental justice. If the USDA would consider a smaller grant application fund (e.g., \$15,000), then it could be an option for the city.
- Colorado State Forest Service has an Urban and Community Forestry Program that will hopefully apply.
- The Park People is another organization that focuses on mitigating urban heat sinks and other urban forestry initiatives. They could potentially apply.

SPRUWP SCIENCE & DATA COMMITTEE UPDATES

Samuel Wallace provided an update on the work of the Science and Data Committee. His comments are summarized below.

- The Committee is nearly finished finalizing the water quality assessment tool. The tool features a map of the South Platte Watershed, and users can select specific parameters to explore water quality data (e.g., dissolved oxygen across the watershed). The tool contains site-level data and will be continuously and automatically updated with any data inputted to the EPA's Water Quality Portal or Colorado Data Sharing Network.
- The Committee will present the tool at an upcoming SPRUWP meeting.

NEXT STEPS

The upcoming SPRUWP quarterly meeting is on, Tuesday August 15, 2023.