



## Updates from the Water Quality & Quantity Committee - QQ

### Tough negotiation and collaboration allow hard-fought benefits to be realized on Western Slope

Milestones for water advocates can be years in the making. As a 40-plus year advocating entity and partner to many local jurisdictions involved these matters, NWCCOG and the Water Quality & Quantity Committee (QQ) have been keeping a close eye on recent milestones for two major transmountain diversion expansion projects which occurred this past month. Those expansions are the Windy Gap Firming Project (WGFP) and Denver Water's Moffat Firming Project which also includes the expansion of Gross Reservoir. In the vernacular of water projects, the term firming is used to accommodate further definition (or firming up) of actual energy or water related demands. Negotiated agreements for both projects provide long range front-range water storage needs as well as provisions for restoring and enhancing aquatic environments on the Western Slope. The milestones are described in more detail below.



Torie Jarvis and Jon Stavney

Grand County, home to the headwaters of the Colorado River, has been at the center of years of negotiation, litigation, and finally collaboration between Western Slope water users and Front Range demand for that water. NWCCOG is the regional water quality management agency for Region 12 and QQ played an important role in a decade of negotiations to analyze the many water quality impacts of the proposed projects. These efforts allowed negotiations during that process to focus on financial and water contributions directly linked to protecting water quality and aquatic habitat. Importantly, NWCCOG advocated for the transmountain diverters and other parties to commit to long term adaptive management to monitor and respond to the real-world impacts once these projects go online.

These past two months have seen important steps for realizing these negotiated benefits for Grand County and the Western Slope in the Windy Gap Firming Project (WGFP) and Denver Water's Moffat Firming Project which also includes the expansion of Gross Reservoir.

Last month the Northern Water Municipal subdistrict agreed to settle a federal lawsuit paving the way for two important projects – the construction of the Chimney Hollow Reservoir in Larimer County, and the Colorado River Connectivity Channel which will build a bypass channel around the Windy Gap Reservoir, reconnecting the Colorado River below the reservoir.

The new Chimney Hollow Reservoir is a key component of the Windy Gap Firming Project and will help to bring a reliable water supply to 12 municipalities on the front range

including: Boulder, Erie, Superior, Louisville, Ft. Lupton, Greeley, Loveland, Longmont, Lafayette, the Little Thompson Water District, the Platte River Power Authority, and the Central Weld County Water District. The new reservoir will be constructed in western Larimer County, will store 90,000 acre-feet of water from the Wendy Gap Project and provide the participating municipalities with long term water needs.

The settlement between Northern Water and various environmental groups included a \$15 million contribution from Northern Water. More importantly, the settlement allows construction of Chimney Hollow Reservoir to begin; much of the negotiated payments and water contributions are contingent on Chimney Hollow construction beginning.

Funding for the Colorado River Connectivity Channel also hinges on initial contribution of Chimney Hollow Reservoir. Currently the Windy Gap Reservoir dams the Colorado River into a shallow reservoir, blocking sediment transport and elevating water temperatures and in turn damaging aquatic organisms, degrading downstream aquatic and riparian habitat -- thus a decline of the trout fishery. To combat these important environmental concerns, the Colorado River Connectivity Channel (CRCC) will be constructed around the Windy Gap Reservoir connecting with the Colorado River below the dam. The channel will create a healthier river system and benefit irrigators, communities and people who recreate on Grand County rivers.



*Chimney Hollow Reservoir site*

Asked to comment on impacts of the outcome of this ruling, Torie Jarvis, Director of QQ said this, "The negotiated benefits during permitting of the WGFP came about in large part because of the good relationships formed between COG, Grand County, the Colorado River District, other west slope parties, Trout Unlimited, federal agencies, and many others. Without those good relationships from Learning By Doing\*, a project like the Colorado River Connectivity Channel likely wouldn't have been possible. It's not the kind of project that could happen as the result of litigation. It takes relationships! The beneficiaries include the trout and other aquatic life, anglers, downstream irrigators, and downstream recreationists—a very diverse group."



*Lake Granby inlet of water coming from Windy Gap Pump Plant.*

**Notes:**

The Northern Water Municipal Subdistrict announced its municipal subdistrict approved a settlement with several environmental groups involved in a lawsuit with federal agencies permitting the WGFP (Save the Colo, Save the Poudre, Poudre Waterkeeper, Wildearth Guardians, Living Rivers, Waterkeeper Alliance, Sierra Club).

\*For more information about the Grand County Learning By Doing initiative [Click Here.](#)

Photo credit Northern Water website



A Denver Water truck is seen near Gross Dam in Boulder County on Dec. 2, 2020. (Matthew Jonas/Staff Photographer)

## Project/ Gross Reservoir Expansion

A similar group of ecological organizations filed suit in US District Court alleging the US Army Corp of Engineers failed to consider the environmental impacts of expanding the Gross Reservoir near Boulder, for permitting Denver Water's Moffat Firming Project, another transmountain diversion expansion project impacting Grand County, the Western Slope, and Denver Water.

In early April, the federal district court judge dismissed the lawsuit, filed in 2018, paving the way for the expansion. Dozens of benefits under the [Colorado River Cooperative Agreement](#) (CRCA) will not go into effect unless this project is constructed. The CRCA is an approach that provides proper balance among competing interests, a shared vision for better river health, reliable supply for all water users, and a future of cooperation, not conflict. It is precisely that approach that this agreement — among more than 40 water providers, local governments, and the ski industry — embodies.

Benefits include:

- Improving the health of Colorado's rivers and streams by dedicating funds to pay for watershed health, water treatment, and aquatic habitat improvements in the Colorado River Basin.
- Additional water for towns, districts and ski areas in Grand and Summit counties to serve the needs of their residents and to improve the health of rivers and streams.
- An agreement to operate key Denver Water facilities, such as Dillon Reservoir in Summit County, and Williams Fork Reservoir and the Moffat Collection System in Grand County, in a way that better addresses the needs and concerns of neighboring communities and enhances the river environment.
- Additional water and enhanced system reliability for customers of Denver Water, representing nearly 25 percent of the state's population, by moving forward the Moffat Collection System Project.

According to Jarvis, there are millions of dollars in financial commitments, to be allocated by Grand County and the Learning By Doing Adaptive Management Committee, that are contingent on the project being built. There are commitments to provide water stored in Denver Water reservoirs for environmental protection, recreation, municipal, and agricultural water uses as well.

Given the above settlement with Northern Water, it's hard to imagine the environmental groups won't appeal, but no appeal has been filed to date.

Before Gross Reservoir may be expanded, Denver Water requires a 1041 permit from Boulder County. The project is slated to raise the existing 340-foot Gross Dam by an additional 130 feet, increasing capacity by 77,000 acre-feet and securing water needs for up to 1.5 million people.

For more information, check out this [Daily Camera story](#). Photo credit Daily Camera

## Colorado Demand Management Framework.

The Colorado Water Conservation Board recently released a [draft Demand Management Framework](#). This document outlines issues and possible paths forward in developing a demand management program in Colorado to meet Colorado River Compact obligations through temporary, voluntary, and compensated reductions in consumptive water use. QQ is still reviewing this framework but wanted to share with you all for feedback and input as well. See the [Demand Management FAQ sheet here](#).

Feedback should be emailed to Torie Jarvis [-QQWater@nwccog.org](mailto:-QQWater@nwccog.org)

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NWCCOG continues to be committed to a long-term vision for water supply on the western slope of Colorado. This is as critical as ever given that Climate Change scientists predict that clean water availability may be the critically most impacted resource in the future. Between 2001 and 2018, 74% of the world's natural disasters were water related - including droughts and floods. When disasters hit, they can leave the water sources depleted or contaminated. The stewardship of water quality and quantity is essential both globally and locally in our own communities. For more information about our programs go to our website at <https://www.nwccog.org/programs/water-quality-quantity/>.

# NWCCOG provides \$150,000 in EDA CARES Act funding to the Region's Counties for COVID Recovery and Resiliency Efforts

## NWCCOG provides \$150,000 in EDA CARES Act funding to the Region's Counties for COVID Recovery and Resiliency Efforts

The NWCCOG Economic Development District was awarded a \$400,000 EDA CARES Act grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration on 7/1/2020 to assist our region in COVID recovery and resiliency efforts. NWCCOG awarded a total of \$150,000 of this grant directly to the 5 counties of Region 12 (\$30,000 each) to help support each counties' unique recovery and resiliency efforts. Each county will use their \$30,000 for their own unique projects for COVID relief and recovery, as follows:

### **Eagle County: Eagle County Vista Project**

The Eagle County Vista Project is a community vision and strategy project that invites community members to help identify solutions to challenges created by COVID-19, and design a future for Eagle County with health, equity, and resilience in mind. To date, the county has made presentations to local community partners, recruited for members of the Stewardship Team, developed an engagement strategy toolkit, worked on an integration strategy with the Eagle County Comprehensive Plan, and coordinated resources to support outreach into the Latinx community.

### **Grand County: Economic Workflow and Resiliency Effort**

Grand County will use the funds to build the capacity of their Work in Grand initiative, a partnership of regional business and industry leaders working together to help tackle one of the greatest economic hurdles to economic sustainability and resiliency: access to a reliable talent supply chain. This funding will be used to enhance the WIG platform established before the pandemic hit by assisting the longevity of the local workforce find equitable jobs, housing, and other resources in the county and will help connect businesses to employees. Over the last six months, WIG has developed an Industry Lead Partnership in the area of Tourism and Hospitality, and has convened this group monthly to discuss talent supply needs and solutions.

### **Jackson County: Establishment of a Public Health Department**

Jackson County was lacking a public health department in the years leading up to the pandemic. Once COVID hit, it was glaringly obvious they needed one. Jackson County has hired a public health nurse, and has been able to offer testing and vaccinations. The county public health board, made up of the 3 commissioners, are meeting monthly to provide updates on current COVID-19 case numbers, vaccination efforts and numbers, current dial status and what that means for Jackson County, happenings at the school related to health, the future of their new public health program, and visions moving forward. A collaborative relationship has been formed between the Board of Public Health and its advisors, which has allowed for effective policy implementation for their community.

### **Pitkin County: Visitor Communication Plan for the Winter**

Pitkin County will use the funds to build a collective, comprehensive visitor and guest communication plan to ensure a successful, safe and open winter. The county has formed a working group comprised of the Aspen Chamber, Basalt Chamber, GoSnowmass, Pitkin County Public Health, Aspen Skiing Company, and the City of Aspen to develop and implement this communications plan recognizing that the collective community's path for an economic recovery and resiliency relies on ensuring that the county and all the communities within are safe to visit, and businesses are able to remain open all year round. The communications plan has included the development of the Healthy Winters Campaign which included six posters as marketing and messaging across the entire community, to visitors, tourism as well as at the ski area.

### **Summit County: Toolkit for Economic Recovery and Resiliency**

Summit County will use the funds for a variety of tools including business training programs and support workshops, talent development projects, COVID economic impact studies, messaging, and cooperative efforts with Summit County and other organizations to coordinate economic recovery and resiliency efforts into the future. Cooperation between Summit County, the Summit Chamber, Summit Prosperity Initiative, and the business and non-profit communities, has been instrumental as they've navigated the changes to the COVID dial and the related restrictions. These groups have been working together to communicate the changes to the stakeholders and to develop strategies for the various business sectors to reopen.

**We've Launched!**  
**Our new website is up and running -- check it out. Get to know us better.**

**Next Council Meeting - Thursday, May 27, 2021**

***Full Council & EDD Board Meeting***

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-site location TBD

Time: 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Primary Agenda Items: Review/Acceptance of 2020 Audit