

Group Gathering to Discuss Purgatoire River Watershed

Few things are more important than protecting and conserving the life waters of a community. No one natural resource used on a daily basis is taken for granted more, and yet, water is an increasingly competitive resource and could become one of the most endangered resources in Colorado.

A group of local citizens and organizational and government leaders has been meeting regularly with the hopes of developing a Watershed Plan for the Purgatoire River. The goal is that these efforts will result in improved water quality and water quantity and resolve key issues and areas of concern by utilizing any and all state, federal and private funds available. The Purgatoire River Watershed area encompasses approximately 2,122,320 acres and is located in a four-county area of southeastern Colorado.

Still in the infant stages, the group is currently identifying all the key stakeholders - from the landowner to private industry and municipalities, to government agencies and non-profit organizations - with each individual currently involved reaching out to other stakeholders to guide in the planning process, facilitating communication and promoting community involvement.

The end result will be to complete a holistic Watershed Plan that is ready for implementation to address as many watershed issues as possible for the citizens utilizing the life waters that flow through the communities along the Purgatoire River and its tributaries.

Over 75 Watershed Groups in the state of Colorado are watching over their waters, protecting and improving the known, perceived and potential water quality impacts in their watershed areas.

“Developing and implementing a watershed plan takes months or even years,” explained Jeff Crane. “But the success of any watershed plan is based on finding common ground and developing shared watershed goals and shared responsibility for achieving those goals.”

Crane is the Executive Director for the Colorado Watershed Assembly (CWA) and is facilitating the group in the start-up process. He is a hydrologist specializing in stream restoration, irrigation diversion and habitat enhancement projects. The CWA builds partnerships to protect your water. They support, provide leadership and advocate for individual, grassroots,

and nonprofit community groups to help them protect, conserve and enhance the states watersheds.

After three meetings in as many months, and the growth of the stakeholder group, Crane continues to emphasize the need for the involvement of knowledgeable and engaged local citizens who are familiar with the local watershed to become organized and carry out the development of the watershed planning process.

“Watershed protection, conservation and enhancement can only be effective if it is local,” Crane stressed.

Some of the emerging concerns, issues and challenges identified at the meetings have included Selenium; sediment; erosion; agriculture; forest and aquatic life health; coal mining and gas development impacts; bank stabilization; water conservation; invasive species and more.

Interested stakeholders already involved include the USDA Natural Resource Conservation District, Culebra Range Community Coalition, Trout Unlimited, Trinidad Community Foundation, Las Animas County Commissioners, Southern Colorado Environmental Council, Pioneer Natural Resources, Norwest Corporation, XTO Energy, North Fork Ranches, El Moro Ditch Co., Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site, business owners, landowners and more. The next meeting will be held in the Commissioner’s Chambers at the Las Animas County Courthouse beginning at 6 p.m. on February 9, 2012. All community stakeholders are encouraged to participate. For additional information, please visit www.coloradowater.org or contact Levi Montoya at 719-846-3681 x 3 or email levi.montoya@co.usda.gov