

# Conservation through Watershed Plan Development

Lower South Platte River Watershed, Colorado

Prepared by:

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- Background and reference information to support PowerPoint presentation -

Project Initiated: July 2009

Funding for the Project: Funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the form of a competitive grant awarded through Colorado Nonpoint Source Program with project and financial oversight provided by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment – Water Quality Control Division personnel.

Project Sponsor: The Colorado State Conservation Board is the sponsor for the project. Mark Cronquist, Northeast Region Conservation Specialist, is coordinating the project on behalf of the board, developing partner collaboration, stakeholder participation and conducting the data review prior to writing the plan.

Project Partners as Core Committee members: The ongoing success of this project is the commitment of a diverse and engaged Core (advisory) Committee utilized extensively by the Project Coordinator to look at all aspect of water quality in this basin. Organizations and agencies on the committee represent a wide range of water interests in the watershed. Entities represented include:

- Audubon Colorado
- Central Colorado Water Conservancy Dist.
- Colorado Cattlemen’s Assoc.
- Colorado Corn
- Colorado Department of Agriculture
- Colorado Division of Wildlife
- Colorado Livestock Assoc.
- Colorado State University
- Colorado State University Extension
- Lower South Platte Water Conservancy Dist.
- Lower South Platte Watershed Assoc.
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- North Front Range Water Quality Planning Assoc.
- Northern Colorado Water Conservancy
- Northeast Colorado Health Department
- Sedgwick County Conservation District
- West Greeley Conservation District

In addition to attending regular committee meetings, the representatives of these agencies and groups have diligently worked to plan, promote and present public input meetings and have involved their membership or stakeholders in the watershed to get a broad base of water quality concerns.

## Why is a Watershed Plan Important for the Lower South Platte River in Colorado?

In this basin, the predominant use of water is for agricultural production. In the state, 75% of the value of crops is from irrigated lands, a trend closely followed by crop production in the plan area. Although agriculture is a dominant water use, rapid changes in land development are occurring and the impacts to rural communities are key concerns, emphasizing the importance of having a dependable and secure water supply. By 2030, it is projected an additional 2 million residents will live in Colorado's portion of the South Platte River Basin, and these additional people will need an estimated 400,000 acre feet of water to meet their demand. It is imperative the water available to the Lower South Platte Watershed, both from surface and groundwater sources, must be protected for the future economic and environmental viability of the area.

When completed, the plan will:

- Detail the prioritized water quality concerns from the watershed.
- Provide a dynamic strategy for implementing practices to deal with water quality, water quantity and land stewardship issues identified during the planning process.
- Be the guide and focus for groups within the watershed to apply for grants to address the problems documented in the plan.

Non-prioritized examples of watershed concerns and issues expressed by stakeholders in the Lower South Platte Watershed during the input process:

- ü Uranium and radium (radionuclides) in domestic drinking water sources.
- ü Lack of land management knowledge with new rural residents affecting water quality.
- ü The potential for invasive Aquatic Nuisance Species to affect water delivery infrastructure and water quality (e.g., zebra/quagga mussels, sago pondweed and Eurasian water milfoil).
- ü Phosphorous and nitrate contamination in surface and ground water.
- ü Monitor land use changes (commercial development, small acreage expansion, energy exploration, etc.) and their effects on water resources.
- ü Increased irrigation efficiency affecting return flows to the river.
- ü Increase water monitoring in the Lower South Platte Basin and share the data with other groups.
- ü Emerging contaminants (pharmaceuticals, disinfectants, fragrances, detergents, etc.) and their impacts on water quality.