

Cache la Poudre Instream Flow Augmentation Plan

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Abstract

This presentation will describe a new tool for addressing stream health together through partnerships with more traditional, consumptive water users on one of Colorado's hardest working rivers. The Cache la Poudre drops from the Continental Divide through the city of Fort Collins to the eastern plains and the City of Greeley, where the river meets the South Platte. The Poudre is locally known as the "working Cache"—it is a river essential to the lives of more than a half-million people in the northern Colorado Front Range that has been over-appropriated since 1874. Between the mouth of the Poudre Canyon and the South Platte Confluence, the Poudre River is diverted and exchanged for agricultural, municipal and industrial uses extensively enough that it regularly dries up at seven locations. The Colorado Water Trust has been working with water users including the Cache la Poudre Water Users Association, the cities of Fort Collins, Greeley, and Thornton, and the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District in addition to state agencies the Colorado Water Conservation Board and Colorado Parks and Wildlife on a project that could reconnect the Poudre at the dry-up locations while protecting and honoring consumptive use diversions. Using a law-based and court-approved tool called an augmentation plan, the project partners will be able to voluntarily contribute water that has been decreed for augmentation back to the Poudre River where it can be protected for instream flow use. We believe this concept could open up opportunities in the Colorado River Basin for streamflow restoration projects that complement longstanding consumptive uses.