

4. WATERSHED INITIATIVES

EPA's current emphasis is on managing water quality based on a watershed approach. This trend was initiated in the late 1980's and since that time numerous programs and related efforts have been implemented at the Federal, State, and local level. The NFRWQPA supports this broader approach to watershed planning in the region. This is evidenced by the support the Association has provided to the local watershed efforts.

In the region, there are three active watershed organizations including the Big Thompson Watershed Forum (BTWF), Big Dry Creek Watershed Association, and the Barr / Milton Watershed Association.

Big Thompson Watershed Forum

Of the three active watershed associations in the region, the NFRWQPA has been the most active and committed to the BTWF. In 1996, the NFRWQPA, with funding from the cities of Loveland and Greeley, Larimer County, and Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District completed a preliminary watershed study of the Big Thompson River. This study recommended the establishment of a collaborative watershed management effort to address the need for scientifically sound studies of the effects of our activities on water quality, an effective communication network among stakeholders, and an educational program to increase public awareness of the watershed and associated water quality. When the final report was presented to the public, a group of concerned people representing private citizens and government agencies endorsed the formation of a watershed forum. This was the beginning of the Big Thompson Watershed Forum.

The mission of the Forum is to protect and improve water quality in the Big Thompson Watershed through collaborative monitoring, assessment, education and restoration projects. Throughout their early years, the Forum functioned as a branch of the NFRWQPA. The Association provided administrative support and participated directly with a designated representative serving on the Board of Directors. Over the last few years, the Forum found it to be increasingly beneficial to establish itself as a separate non-profit group. In 2004, the Forum filed for nonprofit status, however the relationship with the NFRWQPA has continued.

One of the strongest benefits that the Forum has been able to provide to its members and the community is the establishment of a coordinated monitoring program that extends throughout the watershed. These coordinated monitoring sites are identified on the regional map provided at the end of this chapter. Over the years this program, with the support of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), has developed into a valuable water quality resource not only to the member entities, but also on a statewide basis. NFRWQPA remains involved in the program and continues to serve as the contracting entities with USGS for the data collection and sample analysis.

Big Dry Creek Watershed Association

The Big Dry Creek Association is a voluntary association of individuals and entities who have a shared desire to develop a sound scientific understanding of the water quality, flow, aquatic life, and habitat conditions in the watershed and act to improve these conditions. The group was formed in 1997 with the initial participants being the City and County of Broomfield, City of Northglenn, the City of Westminster, and the U.S. Department of Energy Rocky Flats Environmental Technology

Site with support from EPA. In 2004 the group officially incorporated as a nonprofit entity with the City of Thornton, Adams County, and Weld County also joining.

One of the primary activities of the Association has been the establishment of an in-stream monitoring program. The locations of the monitoring sites within Weld County are shown on the map at the end of this chapter. The Association maintains a large database from this program and analyzes this data and makes regular reports to its stakeholders of the findings. Many of the current members of the Association are also active members of the NFRWQPA. In addition, NFRWQPA staff regularly attends meetings of the Association which allows for a sharing of information and coordination between the two entities.

Barr Lake & Milton Reservoir Watershed Association

The Barr Lake & Milton Reservoir Watershed Association is a watershed group that was established in 2002 and formalized themselves as a nonprofit in 2005. The mission of the group is to encourage cooperation, involvement, and awareness by interested parties in collaborative efforts to improve the water quality of Barr Lake and Milton Reservoir. In both Barr Lake and Milton Reservoir, high concentrations of nutrients have led to elevated pH and algae overgrowth. In 2002, both reservoirs were placed on the 303(d) list of impaired water bodies for exceeding the upper pH limit of 9.0. This listing established the need for the development of a pH Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the water bodies.

The group was able to establish itself and support its activities associated with addressing the pH issues through a large multi-year 319 nonpoint source grant and significant contributions from the member entities. The group has applied these funds to the development of a draft pH TMDL which was submitted to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment in December of 2010. NFRWQPA has participated in the group since its establishment and has been a voting member since 2006. One of the significant accomplishments of the Association has been the publication of the Barr Lake & Milton Reservoir Watershed Management Plan. This plan and subsequent updates are the result of years of work by a variety of stakeholders and lays out the road map for future water quality activities in the watershed that are intended to improve water quality in the two reservoirs specifically focused on pH. The plan will be updated annually as work progresses in the watershed.

Other

In addition to the three active watershed groups, there has also been a watershed proposal for the Lower South Platte River. The Colorado Department of Agriculture was awarded a 319 Grant for this proposal in 2006. The goals of this proposal were to coordinate landowners/manager and other stakeholders within Colorado's Lower South Platte Watershed to:

- determine priorities for managing natural and agricultural resources within the basin.
- assemble all currently available knowledge and resources to better understand overall resource needs that affect ecosystem functions and overall water quality flowing through the basin in a comprehensive watershed plan.
- establish the Lower South Platte Watershed Plan as a working tool for resource managers and Conservation Districts so that water quality is ultimately improved despite increased demands.

A stakehold process for the development of this watershed plan has been established and NFRWQPA has been an active participant on the steering committee.

While there is not an active watershed association established on the Cache la Poudre River the NFRWQPA has supported in the past, and continues to provide support for broad based water quality

activities along the river. In 2006 the NFRWQPA established the Poudre Monitoring Committee. This Committee is made up of members of the NFRWQPA. The establishment of this committee was spearheaded by Kodak Colorado Division. Kodak recognized an opportunity, through their Environmental Leadership Program, to bring together neighboring entities along segments 11, 12, and 13 of the river and to develop a coordinated monitoring program. The intent of the program was to eliminate redundant monitoring, share data, facility coordination, and provide standardization of data analysis and methods. In addition, the group saw an opportunity to balance effluent monitoring with ambient monitoring in order to reduce overall monitoring costs. This effort has received national recognition and in 2007 the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment received an award from the Environmental Protection Agency for their participation in this effort.

In October 2007 the Committee members, who include Kodak Colorado, City of Ft. Collins, City of Greeley, Town of Windsor, and the Boxelder and South Ft. Collins Sanitation Districts, all signed the Cache la Poudre River – Segments 11, 12, and 13 Water Quality Monitoring Agreement. This agreement formalizes the commitment of each of the entities to the monitoring program. In addition, it outlines the coordinated program and identifies the individual responsibilities of each of the members. The monitoring sites for this program are also identified on the following map.