

## March 2023

Thanks for staying tuned during this long process. To those of you who are new, welcome to the cause! We are still waiting for the Corps of Engineers to schedule the second Public Scoping Meeting.

### Advocacy highlights over the past year-

- Last August we hosted an event in the Park which was attended by 14 elected officials and some 200 of our supporters. After a short presentation, we offered guided and self-guided hikes. Literature, yard signs and t-shirts were available.
- We participated in the Colorado Water Plan Update process throughout the summer of 2022 and submitted final review comments in September. Many of our supporters did the same. In January, we attended the official launch of the new Water Plan. The Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) continues to note our concerns.
- We hosted a volunteer day at the Park to help mitigate beaver damage along the creek.
- We incorporated into a 501(c)(3) organization, and we continue to work with the Environmental Law Clinic at DU to receive legal advice and support on a number of issues.

**Background:** In 2015, the CWCB became the non-federal sponsor for the Bear Creek Lake Reallocation Feasibility Study, which began in September of 2021. The first Public Scoping Meeting was held in October of the same year. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has been analyzing the feasibility of water storage increases ranging from 100 acre feet (AF) to 20,000 AF. As you are aware, a 20,000 AF expansion would inundate nearly two miles of Bear and Turkey Creek combined and consume over 500 acres of trails, riparian areas, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and cottonwood forests.

One feasibility challenge for a significant expansion is the unreliability of dependable inflow from Bear Creek. The Corps has been working on a General Yield Analysis for a couple years and I understand *that* part of the broader study is nearly complete.

Another challenge is dam safety. The Corps is evaluating how flood risk could be affected by a substantial *reallocation*, which refers to reallocating reservoir space *from* flood control *to* water storage.

The second Public Scoping Meeting is on the horizon for sometime this spring, and we'll get 30 days advance notice when the date is set. I do not know at this time whether the meeting will be virtual, in-person, or hybrid.

It is important to note that we don't know IF, or to what degree, a reallocation will be determined feasible. Therefore, nothing official has been signed by the entities

interested in purchasing additional storage, and importantly, the water rights application has NOT been filed.

A previous feasibility study looked into expanding the reservoir by a similar amount some 20 years ago. The conclusion *then* was that it was not feasible.

**Don't we need this water storage?** We continue to believe that opposing a large reallocation of Bear Creek Lake is an ethical and informed position, despite the current water crisis. Significant opportunity for conservation and other storage alternatives exists. Let's start there.

According to the Colorado Water Plan, the state's water use is divided into three broad sectors:

- Municipal: 7% of Colorado's water use.
- Industrial: 3% of the state's water use.
- Agricultural: 90% of Colorado's water use.

While we must all do our part, our shared water crisis cannot be solved by individual users and municipal providers alone. **Just a 4% percent reduction in Colorado's agricultural water use is equivalent to a 50% reduction in state-wide municipal use.** Agriculture provides us with the food and fiber we need to survive, and it is a critical economic driver in the state. The agricultural sector also presents tremendous opportunity for water conservation.

Water Education Colorado dedicated last summer's edition of Headwaters Magazine to the promise of conservation in the Agricultural Sector (<https://www.watereducationcolorado.org/publications-and-radio/headwaters-magazine/summer-2022-how-are-colorado-farms-and-ranches-managing-water-for-tomorrow/>). The lead article explains how tomorrow's farms and ranches will use less water than today's through improved irrigation infrastructure and agricultural practices. It goes on to describe how these methods can reduce irrigation requirements in eastern Colorado by 10%. It's unreasonable to expect that a 10% reduction will occur across the entire Agricultural Sector. But for the sake of comparison, the volume of water *conserved* in that scenario is more than the amount of water used by all of Colorado's municipal water providers combined. (Ag water = 4,844,000 acre feet/year; municipal use = 380,000 acre feet per year; source: Colorado Water Plan)

**Population growth:** When this reallocation was first proposed, the state's population was expected to exceed 10 million by the year 2050. Since then, the *rate* of growth in Colorado has decreased. Last year the State Demographer's Office reduced the population estimate for 2050 by 2.4 million people (from 10 million to 7.4 million).

**Alternatives:** Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) offers tremendous opportunity for water storage. Sand and gravel mining along the South Platte continually create pits that can be repurposed into water storage reservoirs.

**Evaluating Social Well-Being:** At the first Public Scoping Meeting, Greg Johnson, Chief of Project Management at the Corps, noted that in 2021, the federal decision-making process had elevated the role of social well-being as a feasibility consideration. Last July 2022 a multi-agency report specifically addressed the cost-benefit evaluation process for federal water resource projects. It concluded that past processes undervalue less quantifiable benefits such as Environmental Justice, Ecosystem Services and Social Well-Being. The Corps of Engineers has since been directed to more comprehensively evaluate environmental and social goals alongside economic goals.

The BCLP hosts nearly a million user visits each year, and that number will increase as residential development continues in the Rooney Valley. Given the opportunities for conservation and alternatives, and the lack of dependable inflow, the benefit of a large-volume reallocation of Bear Creek Reservoir is far from clear.