

Dear Lower Dolores Plan Working Group and Interested Partners:

Once again, we are writing to let you know that the Legislative Subcommittee is still moving along with excellent momentum towards the proposed National Conservation Area (NCA) legislation for the Lower Dolores River Corridor between McPhee and Bedrock.

New developments and news:

- The group continues to meet monthly with two subgroups working on the boundary/outreach to landowners and water/fish/flows. The list of members is below.
- Last fall, the group met with the local Tres Rios BLM office as well as the Southwest District BLM to be educated about policy manuals that inform how land managers make decisions in NCAs. Based on the discussion and manuals, a list of issues was developed that needed further discussion and potential inclusion in the legislative proposal. This issues list has been worked on diligently. For each issue, the Subcommittee has had initial discussion to determine if it needs to be specifically addressed in the proposal. In some cases, research was done or more information was gathered. Then, the group has developed legislative strategies/recommendations for those issues that do warrant more specific attention. When the LDPWG meets, you will be thoroughly briefed on the issues and what the Legislative Subcommittee is recommending for each.
- As everyone knows, the issues of fish/flows are very important and everyone will recall that the Legislative Subcommittee commissioned a native fish study in 2011 called “A Way Forward.” This led to the Implementation Team forming, which is a multi-entity team looking at how to better manage for the native fish while honoring water rights and contracts. After taking comments on the first, 2012 draft of the *Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation Plan for Native Fish*, the Implementation Team will release the Plan this spring. The Plan will serve as a critical companion to the legislative proposal. A subgroup made up of DWCD, MVIC, The Nature Conservancy and The Wilderness Society has started to work on concepts for the NCA proposal around fish/flows (remember, as part of the tradeoff involved in this package, Wild and Scenic River suitability would be removed in exchange for the new NCA). These concepts will be vetted widely especially with affected stakeholders. As the Implementation Team has drafted this revised plan, each section has been vetted by the Legislative Subcommittee as well as by stakeholders who are involved. The plan should be coming out soon.
- Another subgroup has been working on private lands issues. The group worked to develop unique concepts that ensure the protection of private property rights and access to private property. Maps were then developed to show the private property along the river corridor, and meetings are currently underway with all affected landowners to listen to their thoughts and concerns, and to educate them about this process.
- Research has been done on important utility corridors as well as how the Dove Creek Pumps and the River Road (known also as the “Slickrock Trail”) - as well as all county roads - would be handled in the NCA.
- Another aspect is the portion of the river corridor in Montrose County. As part of the proposal, the Dolores River Canyon Wilderness Study Area would be designated as

Wilderness. That portion is in Montrose County so many conversations have happened and will continue with stakeholders and elected officials.

- Over the course of the next few months, the group is going to have some targeted conversations with those in an around the two other NCAs in Colorado (Dominguez-Escalante and McInnis Canyons) to get a sense of lessons learned.

If you all did not know, the Colorado Water Conservation Board granted the DRD \$16,000 to help cover the costs of the Legislative Subcommittee work, which is very helpful. We thank the CWCB for their ongoing support. Also, the Southwestern Water Conservation District (SWWCD) just awarded the Dolores River Dialogue a two-year \$30,000 grant that will help the DRD continue to work on these issues in the broader community through education and dialogue.

So, where does this leave the Lower Dolores Plan Working Group? As was relayed in the last email sent in 2013, the Legislative Subcommittee does not want to meet with you until all of these issues have been resolved at the Subcommittee level. Since this complex proposed legislative package involves tradeoffs, bringing the entire package to you for discussion seems to make sense. The Subcommittee has a lot of momentum right now and will likely be ready to meet with the full Working Group hopefully this summer or early in the fall. Until then, rest assured, there is a ton of work happening! If you have any questions in the meantime, contact either of us below.

Sincerely,

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List of Subcommittee Members:

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Mike Preston, DWCD
Cole Crocker-Bedford, Landowner
Gerald Koppenhafer, MVIC
Al Heaton, Grazing
Rick Gersch, Minerals/Oil/Gas
Peter Mueller, The Nature Conservancy
and

John Whitney, Ex Officio, Senator Bennet's Four Corner's Office
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