We Are Overflowing!

The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership (UWP) is overflowing – with activities, accomplishments and gratitude. Please take a few moments to read about how our young nonprofit and our many, many partners and supporters are making a difference in Ouray County, with positive impacts for our downstream neighbors as well. As you’ll see in the following reports on our various projects and events, we worked hard throughout 2016 to restore and protect our natural, local water resources, and we couldn’t do it without the cooperation of our community.

Thank you for your support and participation!

Tanya Ishikawa, UWP Communications Director

Sneffels Creek Project Diverts Stream from Mine Tailings

The Sneffels Creek Bank Stabilization Project restored a section of stream, approximately 450 feet long and 250 feet wide, adjacent to the historic Atlas Mill on property upstream from the Revenue Mine. The project’s goal was to stabilize the stream bank and relocate the stream channel to prevent water flow and erosion through mine tailings, thereby greatly improving water quality. Sneffels Creek is on the Clean Water Act’s 303(d) List of Impaired Waters for cadmium and zinc and does not support typical aquatic life.

UWP contracted with Bill Coughlin of Western Stream Works, who worked with UWP Project Manager Agnieszka Przeszlowska, to design the project and excavate the area to widen the floodplain, offset the channel by 20 feet and replicate the width and depth of the naturally occurring channel. The project was completed in October 2016, with transplanting the banks with willows from nearby, which are expected to promote revegetation and bank stabilization. UWP will continue to monitor Sneffels Creek to determine the resulting level of water quality improvement.

This project was made possible through state-administered EPA funding provided by a Nonpoint Source Grant from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, as well as a cash match and in-kind services including site assessment and project planning from the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety. Other project partners were the property owner, Ouray Silver Mines, which also made an in-kind contribution of stabilization materials, and the U.S. Forest Service that has property neighboring the site.
In the Summer of 2016, interpretive signs were installed at the Michael Breen Mine to explain its history and the mine remediation project that UWP conducted to improve water quality in the area’s drainage. The mine is located up Engineer Pass Road (County Road 18), a few miles from where the road intersects Highway 550. The project was completed in 2014, with funding and support from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety, and Ouray County.

UWP contractors and volunteers completed an annual round of high-flow and low-flow water sampling at the Michael Breen site and other significant locations in July and September 2016. The data collected at the Michael Breen site will be used to evaluate the impact of the remediation project on water quality in the corresponding section of the Uncompahgre River. Data from other headwaters locations will help characterize metal loading from other sites and inform potential projects. Additional sampling sites were Mineral Creek, off upper Engineer Pass Road, and Imogene Creek near Camp Bird Mine above Ouray. The water analysis is funded by a Nonpoint Source Program Grant from the EPA through the state Department of Public Health and Environment.

UWP also supported water sampling in the Lake Como area, the watershed’s headwaters, located east of Ironton and Red Mountain Pass. Sampling in 2014 and 2015 found zinc concentrations in the surface water that exceed standards for aquatic life. The primary purpose of sampling in fall 2016 and mid-July 2017 is to identify mine sites and other sources of the zinc loading. This information will be used to determine the need, extent and priority for cleanup. UWP’s partners on this project are the Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety and EPA Region 8, in collaboration with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Meanwhile, UWP Board Member Dudley Case and River Watch Volunteer Sharon Case continued their monthly water sampling at five locations along the Uncompahgre River for the program, co-sponsored by Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the Colorado Watershed Assembly. The goal for each sample is to analyze it for pH, hardness, alkalinity and metals content to keep a long-term record of water quality that can be used in studies for future decision making.

In late 2016, UWP began planning a study to identify whether periodic releases of water and sediment from the Ouray Hydropower Dam have any significant impacts to public health or the environment. While the dam’s releases are necessary to remove accumulated sediment and other debris from the reservoir so the hydroelectric facility can continue to operate, the available water quality data shows a significant spike in heavy metals in the Uncompahgre River during each event. The dam itself does not contribute additional heavy metals to the water, which is contaminated by upstream sources, but if the sudden spikes in metal levels are found to have significant impacts, there may be ways to lessen the effects.

UWP and several partners plan to gather more complete data in 2017, through a project conducted by Texas A&M Water Management and Hydrological Science Program graduate student Kirby Peddicord. She will be working with UWP’s Project Manager Agnieszka Przeszlowska and UWP board members, coordinating with various stakeholders including Ouray Hydropower, Ouray County, Ouray, Ridgway, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Trout Unlimited, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and Ridgway State Park.

Gold King Mine Spill Brings Crowd to Mining & Reclamation Conference

A record 156 individuals attended the Sixth Annual San Juan Mining & Reclamation Conference in Durango and Silverton in August 2016. The conference was organized into four sessions with the first session presenting updates on the state of our watersheds, the second focusing on lessons from the Gold King Mine Spill, the third with reports about project monitoring and tools to support actionable results, and the fourth looking into developing innovative responses to the legacy of mining. The presentations concluded with a panel discussion and audience questions about current innovations in mining, water quality and reclamation.

UWP was one of several conference organizers including Mountain Studies Institute, Willow Creek Restoration Committee, Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety, Animas River Community Forum, Animas Watershed Partnership, and the Animas River Stakeholders Group. The event was funded through grants, sponsorships and exhibit fees, totaling $27,255, and in-kind and volunteer services totaling more than $21,000. See who our generous sponsors and supporters were online at www.mountainstudies.org/sjmrc.
Crowd Enjoys Fine Summer Day at the Sunny 2016 Ridgway RiverFest

The Ninth Annual Ridgway Riverfest on Saturday, June 25, 2016, was a huge success – bringing together several hundred community members and visitors to enjoy a full line-up of riverside and in-stream activities and entertainment. Fifty-plus volunteers helped from early morning until evening to create a memorable, fun watershed celebration.

The highlights of the 2016 RiverFest were: live music by local favorite, blues guitarist and vocalist Kipori “Baby Wolf” Woods, a cultural presentation by Ute historian Roland McCook, Yogini Circus entertainers, watershed education activities, face painting by the Voyager Youth Program, and free outdoor morning yoga with Hansa and Jyoti. We had our largest silent auction yet, with more than 100 great deals on river gear and apparel, guided adventures, restaurant certificates, and a variety of books, keepsakes and gifts. Plus, to keep the crowd fortified, we had locally brewed beers from Colorado Boy and Two Rascals, energetically crafted margaritas by “Glenda the Blenda’’ cocktail-blending bicycle, and a fine selection of festival food from Mely’s Lunchbox, Thai 99, and Backstreet Bistro.

The all-age river races brought more than 35 competitors in our four popular race categories, with awards hand-crafted by artists Diedra Krois and Kellie Day. You can check out race results online at ridgwayriverfest.org/category/river-race-results.

Sponsors and silent auction donors were the most plentiful yet, giving generously to raise nearly $15,000 for UWP’s various watershed restoration, protection and education activities. Our top sponsors were Alpine Bank, Town of Ridgway, Paragon Outdoors/BootDoctors, Renewal by Andersen, Mountain Market, San Miguel Power Association, Rocky Mountain Cannabis, Double D Ranch, Ouray Plaindealer, Provisions Cafe, Ridgway Outdoor Experience, RIGS Adventure Co, The Liquor Store, Canyon Bridge, and Colorado Kayak Supply. We are thankful to our many other sponsors and donors who are also listed online at ridgwayriverfest.org/sponsors/sponsors-2016.

2016 Outreach Activities

OUR MISSION: The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership exists to help protect the economic, natural, and scenic values of the Upper Uncompahgre River Watershed. We work to inform and engage all stakeholders and solicit input from diverse interests to ensure collaborative restoration efforts in the watershed.
DeeDee Decker was selected by the UWP board as our 2016 Partner of the Year for her amazing ongoing support of our nonprofit. Living above Ridgway, just a few miles up Highway 62 from the Uncompahgre River, DeeDee and husband and acclaimed author Peter Decker make their home at the Double D Ranch and have been longtime philanthropists and volunteers for many local causes.

Not only does DeeDee give of her time to speak about the significance of UWP for projects like the video above, but you can find her at UWP events throughout the year from the Ridgway RiverFest to our Horsefly Brewery Tap Night fundraiser in Montrose. She steps into any volunteer position with a smile!

She and her husband have also been generous donors during our fundraising drives such as Telluride Gives Day, and provide UWP with our great office on Lena Street in Ridgway. We are shouting out a big thank you to you, DeeDee! We are so appreciative to have you as a stellar partner.