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## New stakeholder group to address Uncompahgre watershed

BY KATI O'HARE

DAILY PRESS WRITER

MONTROSE — The Uncompahgre River, one of the most important resources in the Montrose region, is about to gain a new advocate: a group of stakeholders who will study the watershed and recommend and fund projects to ensure the river's health and longevity.

The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership (UWP) will begin to take shape at a meeting next week open to agricultural, mining, recreational, community and any other entities with an interest in the river. That meeting will be from 5 to 7 p.m. Aug. 25 at DMEA headquarters in Montrose.

Those who attend can review a new water-quality report on the entire river, funded by the Colorado Nonpoint Source Pollution Program of the state Department of Public Health and Environment.

"From my knowledge, this is the first report that has looked at the whole of the river, from metals to e-coli," said

Sarah Sauter, project coordinator for the UWP.

She wants to review the report with the stakeholders to ensure its accuracy before releasing it to the public.

The new group will monitor not only water quality, but also "the thoughts and priorities of the agricultural and mining communities and the bigger water players," Sauter said.

Volunteers are needed for another quick assessment of the river in September.

"This is a quick and dirty look at the river," Sauter said. "It's a snapshot of what the river likes like and is a sister to the water chemistry report."

That report will be paid by the Colorado Healthy River Fund, to which taxpayers donate money voluntarily on their tax returns.

These assessments are critical because the Uncompahgre is a heavily used river, Sauter said.

Mark Twain once said, "Whisky is for drinking, and water is for fighting over."

Sauter agreed, saying:

"Like most rivers, especially in the West, water is a tight resource. ... We want those traditional uses to go on for a long time. But we need to see how we can maintain the historic uses of the river but also maintain its quality for recreation and wildlife."

The UWP, like other watershed groups popping up across the country, will bring together stakeholders to be guided by geography and community rather than political boundaries, she said. Its actions will provide an alternative to regulations, bringing more grassroots involvement to ensure that unique local concerns are addressed.

Sauter, who has a master's degree in environmental science and public affairs, has worked with the Colorado River Watch Program and other watershed groups over the past 10 years.

For more information or to RSVP for the stakeholder meeting, call Sauter at (303) 408-1312 or email UWP volunteer Rachel Boothby at UW-Pvista@gmail.com