



# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

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To sign up for email updates, donate and learn about our activities and volunteer opportunities, visit [www.uncompahgrewatershed.org](http://www.uncompahgrewatershed.org)

Uncompahgre River Gorge  
*Photo by Tanya Ishikawa*

## MONITOR, INFORM, PROTECT & IMPROVE

### Message from Communications Director Tanya Ishikawa

The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership began 2018 by completing the update to our strategic plan that we began in late 2017, to determine which projects were most feasible for the next three years (2018-2020). An exciting variety of annual and long-term programs, as well as new initiatives, rose to the top of our priorities. Five years after becoming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, we are fully engaged with diverse stakeholders in developing and implementing projects that are having positive impacts on watershed health.

Each time that I start writing about UWP's activities, it's always fun to decode the acronym soup, from cfs (cubic feet per second, used to report stream flows) to CERCLA (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, which helps hold resource extraction companies responsible for cleanup activities and created the Superfund program) and so many agency names (CDPHE, DRMS, CWCB, etc.). Sometimes, I can't help but make up a few acronyms of my own. Last spring, I tentatively dubbed a large youth service project: ROARR (Ridgway-Ouray Area Riparian Restoration). As I sat down to write this message, MIPI became my new acronym for UWP's work: Monitor, Inform, Protect, Improve.

In this 2018 Annual Report, you can learn about UWP's efforts in:

- monitoring water quality through River Watch, Hydrodam Sediment Release Study, and Private Well Testing – *see page 4*
- informing the community through school lessons, field trips, festivals and conferences – *see pages 6 and 7*
- protecting and restoring riparian areas by organizing volunteer service events – *see page 3*
- improving streams and water drainage through completed and planned mine remediation projects – *see page 5*

Finally, see page 8 to read about our Partners of the Year, Board Members, large donors and budget information. We are grateful for the strong financial support last year, and 2019 is looking extremely positive as well with large grants and donations from the Telluride Foundation, Town of Ridgway, Ouray County, Helen S. and John J. McKetta Charitable Fund, Ouray County Community Fund, Gary Roberts and Barbara Parish, BeP EarthWise Foundation, and the Massard Fund, supporting new and ongoing projects.

Please take a few moments to check out our recent accomplishments and many, many partners listed in this report. We couldn't do this valuable work without you and look forward to more successes in the coming year.



Governor Creek in Governor Basin  
*Photo by Agnieszka Przeszlowska*

**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.

**Our Goals:**

- (1) Improve water quality
- (2) Improve riverine ecosystem function
- (3) Improve seasonal low flows
- (4) Improve recreational opportunities
- (5) Maintain a stable stakeholder group

UWP is a volunteer-driven nonprofit. We use our funding efficiently by hiring three part-time contractors who together work less hours than one full-time staff position. We are extremely thankful for nearly 100 volunteers who help us accomplish our projects. Our board volunteers alone donated more than 1,000 hours in 2018.



Technical Coordinator Ashley Bembek

Communications Director Tanya Ishikawa



## WATER QUALITY REPORTING HIGHLIGHTS

### Message from Technical Coordinator Ashley Bembek

Hello UWP supporters! I'm excited to share that UWP completed four major reports and updated the Uncompahgre Watershed Plan (<http://www.uncompahgrewatershed.org/reports-plans/>) in 2018. Important highlights from these reports are summarized below:

- The Sneffels Creek Bank Stabilization Project at the Atlas Mill reduced cadmium, lead, and zinc concentrations to improve water quality and habitat in Sneffels Creek.
- The Michael Breen Project improved water quality in the Uncompahgre River by a small margin, plus it stabilized the loadout structure, helping preserve the historic landmark.
- The waste rock repository at the Vernon Mine is stable with no evidence of erosion or drainage. In 2018, plant cover increased substantially.
- The 2016-2017 Headwaters Assessment, a large-scale sample collection effort led by UWP, DRMS, and CDPHE, found that water quality impairments are typically most severe near the headwaters of tributaries in the upper Uncompahgre Watershed, and water quality impairments are less severe and less frequent in the lower portions of those tributaries.
- This finding is important to future reclamation and restoration planning. Improvements in the uppermost portions of the watershed may lead to water quality standards attainment in the lower portions of the watershed.

In 2018, UWP staff, board, and partners collaborated to implement the strategic plan. We supported Trout Unlimited and Ouray Silver Mines as they developed an application to the Supplemental Environmental Project\* program for additional stabilization work in Sneffels Creek near the Atlas Mill site. This project will build upon UWP's work in Sneffels Creek to improve riparian habitat and water quality by limiting the spread of mine tailings.

UWP provided technical assistance to Ouray County and other local stakeholders as the group identified potential projects using funds from the Idarado Natural Resource Damages Fund (funds to restore resources similar to those damaged by the Idarado Project through CERCLA action). After several meetings and much discussion, the local stakeholders recommended that UWP develop a proposal for the Governor Basin Restoration Project. UWP developed a conceptual project design, in collaboration with project partners. The project proposal is currently under review. Fingers crossed that this important work is funded!

\*This project was undertaken in connection with the settlement of enforcement action taken by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for alleged violations of §25-8-501(1), C.R.S. and 5 CCR 1002-61, §61.3(1)(a).



Arizona youth service project at Uncompahgre River & Rollans Park  
Photo by Tanya Ishikawa

## RIPARIAN PROTECTION & RESTORATION

### Volunteer Week at Ridgway Parks

UWP organizes an annual cleanup event at Rollans Park through the Adopt-A-Park Program. This event became something much bigger in 2018, thanks to the volunteer efforts of 70 teenagers from Scottsdale, Arizona. Introduced to us through RIGS Adventure Co. and Ouray County Young Life leader Mark Andersen, more than half of the participants on a youth ministries summer service trip contributed 250 service hours to the upkeep of Ridgway’s parks and riparian areas. During four mornings in June, the group re-graveled the Rollans Park trail, pulled and cut more than a dozen large bags of invasive weeds, maintained and removed protective tree enclosures, weeded and picked up litter at the Ridgway Elementary School playground, helped with a few projects at the Ouray County Ranch History Museum, and stained benches, tables and gazebos in Rollans and Hartwell Parks as well as at the Athletic Fields.

### Love Your Gorge Volunteer Event

In a new collaboration with the Ouray Ice Park, UWP organized its first official riparian area restoration event at the Uncompahgre River Gorge in Ouray. The gorge, where ice climbing activities and a large festival have happened every winter since the early 1990s, needs a little love to ensure the flora, fauna and Uncompahgre River running through it stay healthy and even get healthier. So, our two nonprofits teamed up for the inaugural volunteer event on Sept. 15, when 23 volunteers joined us to remove 6,000 pounds worth of old plastic pipes and metal from around the gorge and stack branches that had piled hazardously across trails over the years. We are proud to say that our efforts were nationally recognized by American Rivers as the 2018 “Tiny but Mighty” Cleanup Champion. We are really looking forward to our 2019 event, scheduled for Sept. 21.

#### Project Funders/Collaborators:

- Colo. River Water Conservation District
- Colo. Watershed Assembly
- La Casa de Cristo Youth Ministries
- Ouray County
- Ouray County Ranch History Museum
- Ouray County Water Users Association
- Ouray Ice Park
- Ridgway Elementary School
- Town of Ridgway
- Tri-County Water Conservancy District
- UWP members

#### Volunteers:

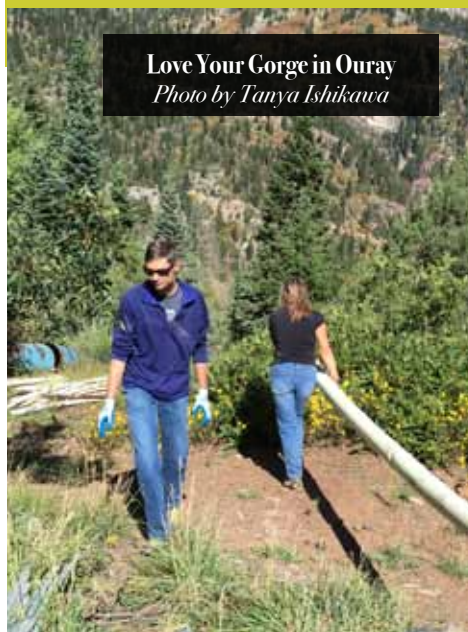
- 70 youth from Scottsdale, Arizona
- 23 Love Your Gorge volunteers
- Mark Andersen
- Judi Chamberlin
- Dan Chernyl
- Cary Denison
- John Hulburd
- Michael Johnson
- Jay Montgomery
- Agnieszka Przeslowska
- Gary Roberts
- Brad Wallis
- Scott Williams

## WATER SUPPLY PROTECTION

### Stream Management Planning Committee

UWP Board Members Michael Johnson and Jay Montgomery served as representatives on this important Ouray County water supply planning group throughout 2018. In March last year, the group, made up of several stakeholders whose goal it is to plan a stable water supply for the future, was awarded an \$83,200 grant by the Colorado Water Conservation Board for the Upper Uncompahgre Cooperative Stream Management Plan. Wright Water Engineers of Durango is gathering data and presented an information update to the committee last autumn. The group hopes to have a plan to present to the community in 2019. UWP’s participation in this process is providing valuable information about watershed science and perspectives gained from our collaborations with the various water users in the community.

Love Your Gorge in Ouray  
Photo by Tanya Ishikawa





Sediment release flowing out of the Ouray Hydrodam reservoir  
Photo by Agnieszka Przeszlowska



## WATER MONITORING

**Project Funders/Collaborators:**  
Centers for Disease Control & Prevention  
Colo. Dept. of Public Health & Environment  
Colorado Parks & Wildlife  
Delta County  
Earth Force  
Eric Jacobsen  
Ouray County  
Town of Ridgway  
River Watch of Colorado  
UWP members

**Volunteers:**  
Dudley Case  
Sharon Case  
Judi Chamberlin  
Jeff Litteral  
Dennis Murphy  
Jay Montgomery  
George Patten  
Gary Roberts

### Colorado River Watch

UWP collected water samples at four sites in the Uncompahgre River every month of 2018. Through this activity, water quality data at four points in the river, stretching from south of Ridgway to north of the Ridgway Reservoir, is uploaded to the Colorado River Watch database. Watershed groups like ours, state agencies and other scientists use this water quality information for such decisions as setting water standards for various uses in different areas and assessing need for and impact of restoration projects. At the end of the year, we were sad to say goodbye to longtime River Watch volunteers Sharon and Dudley Case, who moved out of state. However, UWP plans to continue these water sampling activities with new volunteers including new Board Member Amanda Clements, and we will report on their activities in upcoming newsletters.

### Hydrodam Sediment Release Study

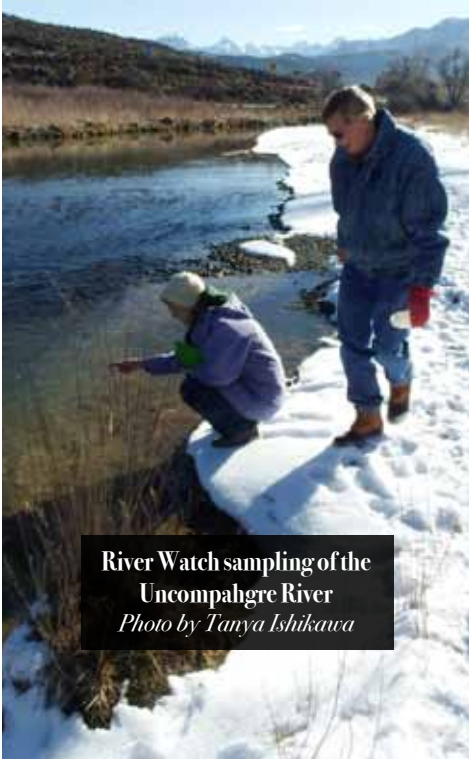
In 2018, UWP planned to follow up its first 2017 study of the annual Ouray Hydrodam sediment release on the Uncompahgre River between the dam and Ridgway Reservoir, to gather more data for analysis. However, due to extremely low river flows and the lack of a regular release, the 2018 study was cancelled. Led by UWP Technical Coordinator Ashley Bembenek of Alpine Environmental Consultants, we plan to conduct the study in 2019, sampling key locations along the river and at the reservoir. This study will help to better understand the impacts of the sediment release and whether alternative management practices could minimize effects of the sediment release.

### Private Well Testing

The 2017 sediment release study found arsenic levels higher than the current water standard in most samples from the Uncompahgre River. Arsenic in drinking water poses a risk to human health. UWP learned that Ouray County was part of a six-county partnership providing free private well water sampling. We decided to reach out to well owners along the Uncompahgre River to determine if any of those wells had higher arsenic levels as well.

In September, the Delta County Public Health Office, the lead agency in the partnership activities, reported the first findings from data collected from wells, which showed elevated arsenic levels in about 10 percent of the wells tested on the Burro Canyon Formation stretching from southern Delta County to northern Ouray County. So, UWP expanded our efforts to promote the free well testing to all of Ouray County.

The grant funding for the free tests is set to end in December 2019, so the collaborating counties and nonprofits are making a big push to get more wells tested in the grant's final year. Our hope is that well owners will be better informed about the safety of their water, and that public health officials will help identify solutions in the event of poor quality.



River Watch sampling of the Uncompahgre River  
Photo by Tanya Ishikawa



### Governor Basin

*Photo courtesy of  
Ouray Silver Mines Inc.*

## MINE REMEDIATION

### Atlas Mill Project Planning

In early 2018, Ouray Silver Mines, Inc. (OSMI) asked UWP if we would partner on a proposed project remediating and stabilizing the Atlas Mill and tailings pile above Ouray. This multi-stakeholder project aims to improve water quality in Sneffels Creek downstream of the Atlas Mill. While UWP completed a similar bank stabilization project in this area in 2017, the new project led by Trout Unlimited aims to extend the bank stabilization to further restore the area and improve water quality by reducing heavy metal drainage into the creek. UWP organized a community meeting in Ouray in July to share the project proposal and get public feedback. The response has been positive, and the project was approved by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The \$350,000 project will be funded partially through the Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) program with a financial penalty paid by OSMI for a water quality violation at the Revenue-Virginus Mine, made by the mine's previous owners. Nearly half of the remaining project funding will be donated by OSMI.

### Idarado Mine Cleanup Update

UWP organized a community meeting in May at the Ouray Community Center, where representatives from the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment and Newmont Mining, presented the history of Idarado Mine remediation efforts, results from recent innovative measure testing, and strategies under development for future work. Work to reduce heavy metals and improve water quality in Red Mountain Creek above Ouray has been happening for 25 years. Idarado's remedial actions in both the Uncompahgre and San Miguel watersheds stem from a 1983 lawsuit filed by the state of Colorado against the company for natural resources damages under CERCLA authority. Although tailings have been successfully stabilized and vegetated in both watersheds, the zinc compliance on the Uncompahgre side has not been met according to monthly water quality monitoring. UWP plans to continue monitoring the company's progress toward the set goal and support effective remediation methods.

### Governor Basin Project Planning

In the summer of 2018, UWP continued discussions with the Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety (DRMS) and Ouray Silver Mines, Inc. (OSMI) about how to use Natural Resource Damages (NRD) Funds from the Idarado Mine consent decree for a restoration project in our watershed. Based on water quality and environmental conditions, conceptual project designs, and potential funding sources, our nonprofit partnered with DRMS and OSMI to develop a plan for a restoration project in Governor Basin, where waste rock and tailings from the Terrible and Virginus mines leach metals that impair water quality, downgradient aquatic and terrestrial habitat, and watershed health. The goal of the proposed project is to collaborate to restore alpine, riparian and aquatic habitat, and improve water quality in Governor, Sneffels and Canyon creeks. We hope to receive approval for the NRD project funding in 2019, and begin the project by 2020.

#### Project Funders/Collaborators:

Colo. Dept. of Public Health & Environment  
Hazardous Materials and Waste Management Division  
Colo. Div. of Mining, Reclamation & Safety  
Gunnison Basin Roundtable  
Newmont Mining  
City of Ouray  
Ouray County  
Ouray Silver Mines, Inc.  
Trout Unlimited  
United States Forest Service

#### Volunteers:

Brian Briggs  
Grant Clark  
Curtis Cross  
Briana Greer  
Michael Johnson  
Dennis Murphy  
Jeff Litteral  
Dana Wilson



Atlas Mill and Sneffels Creek

*Photos by Jeff Litteral*





Revegetation at the  
Vernon Mine site  
*Photo by Jeff Lateral*



## WATER INFORMATION & EDUCATION

### Project Funders/Collaborators:

Colo. Dept. of Public Health & Environment  
Colo. Div. of Mining, Reclamation & Safety  
Ouray County Historical Society  
Ouray County 4H Event Center  
Ridgway School District  
Shavano Conservation District  
UWP Members

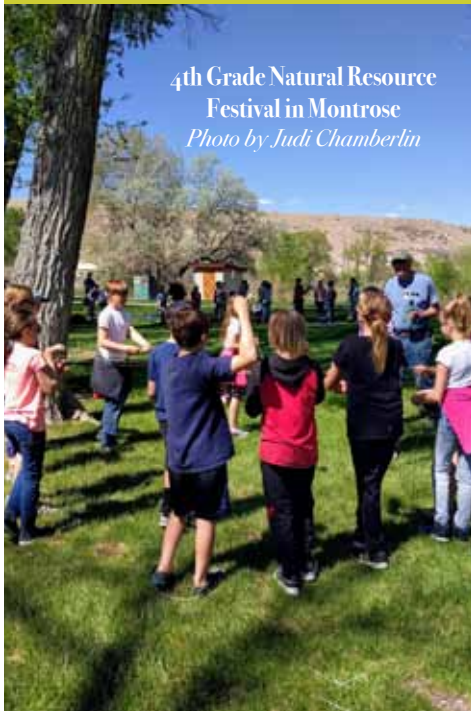
### Volunteers:

Cary Denison  
Michael Johnson  
Mary Menz  
Jay Montgomery  
Dennis Murphy  
Gary Roberts  
Brad Wallis  
Scott Williams

## NPS Mine Remediation Project Report

In November, UWP Technical Coordinator Ashley Bembenek presented “Three Streams, Three Mines & Many Stakeholders”, a report on results from our three watershed improvement projects implemented above Ouray between 2014 and 2017. The goal of the Atlas Mill bank stabilization project was to reduce metals loading to Sneffels Creek by addressing sources from historic mill site. The results included a high survival rate of transplanted willows and 40 percent to 50 percent vegetative cover from seeding. Water quality monitoring results showed a decrease in metal concentrations: 30-percent reduction in cadmium, lead, and zinc concentrations during high flows, and approximately 75-percent reduction in cadmium, lead, and zinc concentrations during low flows. The goal of the Michael Breen Mine project was to reduce metals loading into the Uncompahgre River and stabilize the loadout structure. The project resulted in the diversion of drainage waters under the loadout structure, stabilization of the loadout structure to maintain historical integrity, and a slight decrease in metal concentrations. (However, a portion of the reductions are attributed to lower flows during post-project monitoring events.) The goal of the Vernon Mine project was to reduce metal loading and improve the pH of mine drainage into Gray Copper Gulch. While vegetation was re-established at the site, stream flow variation due to the snowpack limited our ability to evaluate the success of the project. We plan to collect additional water quality samples in 2019 and beyond to determine project outcomes.

4th Grade Natural Resource  
Festival in Montrose  
*Photo by Judi Chamberlin*



## Watershed Education for Elementary Students

For another year, UWP Board Member Brad Wallis led our efforts to teach school-age children about water ecology and our watershed. His educational activities in 2018 took place at the Ridgway Elementary School third-grade classroom, Uncompahgre River at Rollans Park, 4th Grade Natural Resource Festival in Montrose, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife’s Schools and Outdoor Learning Environments Family Nature Night in Ridgway. Brad also reached out to middle and high school teachers, and we hope to add lessons for middle and high school students to our schedule in 2019.

## Red Mountain Mining District Winter Tour

In February, Ouray County Museum Curator Don Paulson once again guided a fun and interesting tour through the snowy landscape of the historic Red Mountain Mining District. A group of 15 guests learned about mining history – the good, the bad and the ugly, including the legacy of heavy metal drainage in the watershed.



2018 Ridgway RiverFest Races  
Photo by Chuck Heywood



## MAJOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION EVENTS

### Fly Fishing Film Tour

For 2018, UWP was the main beneficiary of funds raised by the Fly Fishing Film Tour showing at the Montrose Pavilion, organized by Mayfly Outdoors, Ross Reels and RIGS Fly Shop & Guide Service. UWP volunteers staffed a table during a fly fishing trade show before the evening films, and got to converse with many fishermen and women about the Uncompahgre River and our activities.

### 11th Annual Ridgway RiverFest

Low river flows? Historic drought conditions? UWP didn't let that stop us from celebrating and educating people about our watershed in 2018. The lack of water was even more reason to recognize the importance of a healthy watershed, and raise money to support activities that protect and restore our local water sources. The positive side of the shallower river last June is that we were able to bring back the rubber ducky race that had been cancelled in recent years for fear of losing the ducks in the high flows, creating unintended litter. People of all ages (and their dogs) had a great time watching hundreds of ducks float to the finish line (with the owner of the first duck winning an Alpaca Raft pack raft). Instead of our usual three boat race categories of hard shell, inflatable and stand-up paddle boards, we had one big inflatables race with a hilarious variety of floatable craft of all sizes and shapes. The Junk of the Unc was also wacky as ever with truly creative, homemade boats. To see race winner names and photos, go to <https://ridgwayriverfest.org/category/news/>. We had a wonderful festival day with hundreds of our closest friends, old and new, ending with musical entertainment by Sugar & the Mint from Arizona, who kept a large crowd spellbound until the last moment.

### 7th Annual Mining & Reclamation Conference

The San Juan Mining & Reclamation Conference, organized by a consortium of watershed groups including UWP, returned to Creede in 2018, with the theme of Planning for Resiliency. Presentations explored triple bottom-line economics and how this relates to resiliency; managing risk and stakeholder integration; and best management practices in the realm of adaptive management. With approximately 140 individuals in attendance, diverse stakeholders had opportunities to examine and discuss successes of mining and reclamation to date, as well as contemplate their futures in this region. Conference goers had their choice of two field tours. The Kerber Creek participants learned about the Bonanza Mining District and the reclamation efforts that have occurred there since the early 1990s. Summitville tour participants visited this superfund site to learn about and see first-hand the inner and outer workings of a lime treatment plant that has been operating for years.

**Project Funders/Collaborators:**  
Animas River Stakeholders Group  
Colo. Div. of Mining, Reclamation & Safety  
Colo. Dept. of Public Health & Environment  
Double RL Ranch  
Headwaters Alliance  
Mayfly Outdoors  
Mountain Studies Institute  
Town of Ridgway  
Ross Reels  
Safeway  
San Juan Mountain Runners  
San Miguel Watershed Coalition  
Trout Unlimited  
Ridgway RiverFest Sponsors – see [ridgwayriverfest.org/2018-sponsors/](http://ridgwayriverfest.org/2018-sponsors/)  
San Juan Mining & Reclamation Conference Sponsors – see [tinyurl.com/2018sjmrc-sponsors](http://tinyurl.com/2018sjmrc-sponsors)

**Volunteers:**  
40+ RiverFest volunteers  
10+ Conference volunteers  
UWP Board & Spouses



RiverFest Assistant Coordinator Pamela Cannalte

San Juan Mining & Reclamation Conference field trip





**2018 PARTNERS OF THE YEAR:  
TIM & HEATHER PATTERSON**

The owners of RIGS Fly Shop & Guide Service in Ridgway, Tim and Heather Patterson are constant advocates for protecting rivers and lakes as well as responsible watershed-based recreation. They back up their words with action and financial support of watershed protection activities. In 2017, RIGS asked UWP to join them as hosts for the Fly Fishing Film Tour in Ridgway, and \$3,548 was raised for UWP projects. In 2018, RIGS got UWP involved in the Montrose Fly Fishing Film Tour event, raising another \$3,000 for our nonprofit. Plus, RIGS is an annual sponsor of the Ridgway RiverFest, usually at the Class IV level. Tim volunteered during our strategic planning process that spanned late 2017 and early 2018. But, perhaps the most impactful part of their 2018 support of UWP came when RIGS connected UWP with local Young Life leader Mark Andersen and a group of 120 Arizona teenagers who came to Ouray County for fun and service. These youth plus a few adult volunteers contributed 250 service hours to improving Rollans Park and other local parks in Ridgway last June. (And then, Heather even donated stickers to the youth as gifts.)

Thank you, Tim and Heather! We continually appreciate all your contributions. *(Plus, special thanks to the Colorado Boy Pub & Brewery in Ridgway for donating a gift card to UWP's Partners of the Year.)*

**2018 UWP Board Members**

President  
Anthony Ramsey



Vice President  
Dennis Murphy



Treasurer  
Scott Williams



Secretary  
Judi Chamberlin



Dudley Case

Michael Johnson



Jay Montgomery

George Patten



Gary Roberts

Brad Wallis



**UWP's 2018 FINANCIAL REPORT**

2018 Total Revenue: \$119,787  
2018 Total Expenses: \$77,903  
Net Revenue: \$41,884

Funding by Category

Grants: 66%  
Ridgway RiverFest Proceeds: 18%  
Donations & Memberships: 13%  
Other Fundraising Event Income: 3%

Activities by Category

Programs: 80% of total expenses  
Fundraising:  
RiverFest: 16% of total expenses  
Other events & campaigns: 2%  
General operations: 2% of total expenses

With great donor support and grant awards in 2018, UWP had a very good year financially. We managed to keep our expenses low, so our net revenue helped create reserves and savings for projects in 2019. Donor and grantor generosity not only helped protect and improve our watershed, many of them benefited from charitable tax deductions,

and numerous Colorado residents and businesses received certificates totaling more than \$5,000 in Colorado state income tax credits. Our biggest fundraisers of 2018 were the Ridgway RiverFest, Telluride Gives Day, and our year-end membership drive. Plus, our biggest funders were Telluride Foundation, Town of Ridgway, Colo. Division of Reclamation, Mining & Safety, Ross Reels, Town of Ridgway, BeP Earthwise Foundation (Barbara Parrish and Gary Roberts), Marti and Patrick O'Leary, and Colo. Department of Public Health & Environment.



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