



Strategic Plan 2024-2028

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Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership 2024-2028 Strategic Plan

adopted Jan. 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The staff and board of the Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership (UWP) embarked on a comprehensive, year-long strategic planning effort in 2023, during the organization's 10th anniversary of incorporating as a nonprofit. UWP began the process with establishing a long-term vision and updating our organizational values and objectives. Based on a series of internal conversations and discussions with partners, UWP then determined the most impactful projects and programs to implement over the next five years.

While a watershed is impacted by all the elements and happenings within a drainage area, a watershed conservation group like UWP needs to focus its efforts on specific issues. Our organization carefully reviewed conditions in the Upper Uncompahgre River Watershed and gathered community input over the past year to determine where to concentrate our activities for the most benefit. Now, external circumstances and organizational capacity – UWP's as well as our partner's – will guide the timelines and magnitude of each project, and this plan will adapt as necessary.

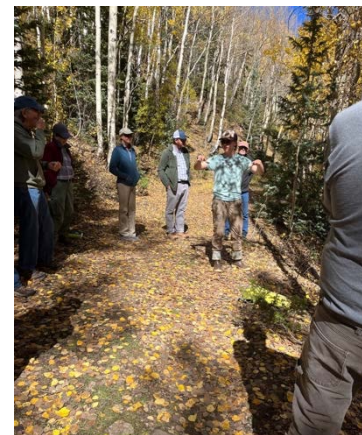
The implementation of this plan over the coming years will not be possible without dedicated board members, talented staff and contractors, and generous funders and partners. Special thanks to those who made this planning effort possible:

Funders: Telluride Foundation, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Nonpoint Source Program, City of Ouray, Ouray County, and Town of Ridgway

Current and outgoing board members: Scott Williams, Dennis Murphy, Michael Johnson, Jay Montgomery, Gary Roberts, Mary Menz, Amanda Clements, Arlen Huggins, Carl Mackey, Phil Harrold, Taylor Poyner, and Dave Ludwick

Facilitator extraordinaire Anthony Poponi of Humore.us, and staff: Ashley Bembenek, Pamela Cannalte, and Jake Kurzweil.

Sincerely, UWP Executive Director Tanya Ishikawa



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Learn more at www.uncompahgrewatershed.org**

UWP's HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

2007: Formed as a grassroots citizens group, with the aim of developing a watershed plan to identify and prioritize projects that would improve water quality and ecosystem health.

2012-13: Completed the watershed plan with the cooperation of more than 20 partners including local and state government agencies and nonprofits.

2013-14: The first staff members, Sarah Sauter and Agnieszka Przeszlowska, built a strong foundation of operational procedures and documents, community events and communications, and donor and grantor support.

2014-2022 Milestones

Completed three mine site restoration projects: Vernon Mine, Michael Breen Mine, and Atlas Mill.

Established a staff of three permanent contractors: Communications Director Tanya Ishikawa, Technical Coordinator Ashley Bembenek, and RiverFest and Administrative Assistant Pamela Cannalte.

Diversified grants and donor base with more than 10 funding agencies and foundations and an average of 80 annual donors.

Accumulated and maintained more than six months of financial reserves.

Grew annual programs such as the Ridgway RiverFest (increasing watershed education components and funds raised), local volunteer coordination for Colorado River Watch (from two volunteers and four sites to six volunteers plus seasonal volunteers and 11 sites), and volunteer cleanups (increased from one to three locations).

Developed annual education and outreach programs for all ages, including targeted audiences such as local students and the recreation community.

2022: Tanya Ishikawa participated in the Water Education Colorado Water Leaders Program, and was promoted to UWP's Executive Director at the end of the year.

2023: Hired Jake Kurzweil and his MSI colleagues for increased scientific consulting support.

Organized three public field trips, five board meetings, two community events, and a dozen presentations, interviews, and site visits with partners to develop the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan.

MISSION

The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership exists to help protect the natural, scenic, and economic values of the Upper Uncompahgre River Watershed, from its headwaters to the northern Ouray county line.

VISION

Our vision is a healthy watershed, restored from past damages and adaptable to changing conditions, with a knowledgeable community dedicated to watershed protection and conservation.

VALUES

The Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership values:

- **educating, engaging, and fostering environmental stewardship**
- **using a science-based approach**
- **acknowledging natural challenges in the watershed**
- **ensuring that projects are feasible, adaptive, and sustainable**
- **leveraging partnerships with collaborators**
- **appreciating the needs and values of diverse water users**

ORGANIZATIONAL OBJECTIVES

- 1. Improve understanding of watershed health and evaluate changes through time by monitoring and analyzing conditions in the watershed.**
- 2. Preserve and restore ecosystem function, water quality, and water quantity necessary for high-quality waterbodies and overall watershed health.**
- 3. Ensure ongoing stewardship of the watershed and its many uses by providing robust education about science, watershed conditions, and best practices.**
- 4. Sustain the organization with a diverse and active board and ample funding to support projects and programs.**

STRATEGIC PLAN PROJECTS LISTED BY OBJECTIVE

Project descriptions, planned funding sources, and partners are listed in the appendix on pages 8-12.

Objective #1 Improve understanding of watershed health and evaluate changes through time by monitoring and analyzing conditions in the watershed.

PROJECTS

- **Colorado River Watch water quality sampling**
- **TMDL* review and community outreach**
- **Red Mountain Creek Watershed Plan update**

** TMDL: Total maximum daily loads are assessments that identify the reductions of nonpoint and point source pollution that must occur to meet the applicable water quality standard, plus a margin of safety, in a given waterbody.*

Objective #2 Preserve and restore ecosystem function, water quality, and water quantity necessary for high-quality waterbodies and overall watershed health.

PROJECTS

- **Ongoing technical review and responses**
- **Cleanups & riparian restoration volunteer events**
- **South Ouray Erosion Control Project**
- **Supporting development of mine reclamation projects throughout the watershed**
- **Governor Basin Restoration Project**
- **Cow Creek stream gage fish barrier renovation**
- **Ridgway river corridor projects**
- **Iron-ton wetland restoration**
- **Idarado Consent Decree outreach**
- **Supporting water quantity improvement efforts**
- **Uncompahgre River headwaters priority projects**
- **Corbett Creek bridge and culvert project**
- **Uncompahgre River improvements at Billy Creek**



Objective #3 Ensure ongoing stewardship of the watershed and its many uses by providing robust education about science, watershed conditions, and best practices.

PROJECTS

- **Rocky Mountain Mining & Reclamation Conference**
- **General education programs & public field trips in the community and schools**
- **Ridgway RiverFest**
- **Growing Water Smart water conservation education**
- **Ironton dispersed camping inventory, education, and site improvements**

Objective #4 Sustain the organization with a diverse and active board and ample funding to support projects and programs.

PROJECTS

- **Administration, communications, and fundraising**
- **Local stewardship outreach efforts, conversation starters, and knowledge builders to develop future volunteers and board members**

To receive updates on UWP's progress on the strategic plan, subscribe to emails at <http://eepurl.com/rb8-T>.



APPENDIX

ONGOING PROJECTS & PROGRAMS

| Project or Program | Description | Funding Sources | Partners |
|---|--|---|---|
| Objective #1 Improve understanding of watershed health and evaluate changes through time by monitoring and analyzing conditions in the watershed. | | | |
| Colorado River Watch water quality sampling | Monitor 6 to 12 stations in the Uncompahgre River and its tributaries., Evaluate, summarize, and share data. (new stations may be added if volunteer capacity increases and or new partnerships develop) | CO River Watch, Town of Ridgway, City of Ouray, Ouray County | CO River Watch, River Science |
| TMDL ² review and community outreach | CO Dept. of Public Health & Environment doesn't anticipate completing until 2032 but UWP will monitor due to significance of TMDL process and effort by the UWP should this move forward. | UWP general fund, TBD local sources | CO Department of Public Health & Environment |
| Objective #2 Preserve and restore ecosystem function, water quality, and water quantity necessary for high-quality waterbodies and overall watershed health. | | | |
| Ongoing technical review and responses | Revenue Virginus Mine, Camp Bird Mine, biosolids, sediment release studies, WQCC rulemaking hearings (Reg 35 and Reg 31), Town of Ridgway annual state of the river report, Uncompahgre River Multi-benefit Project, GMUG plan, etc. | UWP general fund, local government funding | Varies, Ouray County, City of Ouray, Town of Ridgway, CO Department of Public Health & Environment |
| Cleanups and riparian restoration volunteer events | At locations such as Rollans Park, Ouray Ice Park, Ridgway State Park, & other key areas, restore riparian area health by removing litter and debris, managing invasive plants, revegetating, addressing infrastructure needs, etc. | Town of Ridgway, CO Parks & Wildlife, Ouray Ice Park, City of Ouray | Town of Ridgway, Ouray County Vegetation Dept., CO Parks & Wildlife, City of Ouray, Ouray Ice Park, local guiding companies |

¹ These projects and programs are not listed by priority.

² TMDL: Total maximum daily loads are assessments that identify the reductions of nonpoint and point source pollution that must occur to meet the applicable water quality standard, plus a margin of safety, in a given waterbody.

| Project or Program | Description | Funding Sources | Partners |
|--|--|--|--|
| Objective #3 Ensure ongoing stewardship of the watershed and its many uses by providing robust education about science, watershed conditions, and best practices. | | | |
| Rocky Mountain Mining & Reclamation Conference ³ | Collaborate with partners on an annual event to promote education and networking that leads to partnerships to complete mine site reclamation. | CO Department of Public Health & Environment, Nonpoint Source program, private sponsors, DRMS, foundations | CO Division of Reclamation Mining & Safety, U.S. Geological Survey, Mountain Studies Institute, local chambers of commerce, watershed groups, etc. |
| General education programs and public field trips in the community and schools | Natural Resource Festival (Montrose), Watershed displays, school programs, field trips, webinars, community meetings, Uncompahgre River Classic streamflow awareness | UWP general fund, Friends of Youth & Nature, CDPHE ⁴ Nonpoint Source Program, local governments, etc. | Ridgway School District, Ouray School District, Shavano Conservation District, libraries, Ouray Historical Society, etc. |
| Ridgway RiverFest | Produce annual festival to provide watershed education, celebrate river recreation, and raise funds for UWP operation | More than 50 public and private sponsors | Town of Ridgway, Ridgway State Park, etc. |
| Objective #4 Sustain the organization with a diverse and active board and ample funding to support projects and programs. | | | |
| Administration, communications & fundraising | Bookkeeping, grant writing, fundraising, donor development, laboratory analysis, website management, answering inquiries, providing information, correspondence, and promotion | Business, individual and family sponsors | |
| Local stewardship outreach efforts, conversation starters, and knowledge builders | Winter book club, activities over coffee/beer (or by zoom), films, speakers, etc. | UWP general fund | Local bookstores, libraries, film venues, filmmakers, etc. |

³ Formerly named San Juan Mining & Reclamation Conference

⁴ Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

PLANNED & POTENTIAL PROJECTS

- Planned Projects have support of landowners and secured or identified funding sources.
- Potential Projects have support from landowners and less clear funding but reasonable likelihood of funding with support from partners to complete the project.
- Projects are in order of feasibility for UWP to complete, and estimated impact on the watershed, with the highest impact and most feasible projects presented first.
- Each project title is followed by numbers that relate to the Organizational Objectives (OO1, OO2, OO3, OO4).

| Project Title | Description & Objective | Project Type & Timeline | Estimated Total Cost | Existing or Potential Funding Sources | Partners |
|--|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---|
| South Ouray Erosion Control Project (OO2) | Remediate targeted areas to reduce erosion, reduce water quality degradation, and improve recreation infrastructure | Planned: 2024 - 2027 | \$84,000 | CO Department of Public Health & Environment NPS program, project partners | City of Ouray, Ouray County, Ouray Ice Park, U.S. Forest Service |
| Iron-ton dispersed camping inventory, education, and site improvements (OO3) | Inventory conditions in the Iron-ton area with an emphasis on dispersed camping sites (2024), to identify opportunities to restore natural resources and decrease impacts associated with recreational use (2025 or later). | Potential: 2024 - 2028 | TBD | U.S. Forest Service, UWP sustainable recreation funds | U.S. Forest Service, Ouray County, Newmont Mining |
| Supporting development of mine reclamation projects throughout the watershed (OO2) | Research and collaborate on reclamation projects. | Potential: 2024 - 2028 | \$5,000 per year | U.S. Forest Service, CDPHE, CO Division of Reclamation Mining & Safety, EPA | U.S. Forest Service, Trout Unlimited, EPA, CO Div. of Reclamation Mining & Safety, private landowners |
| Governor Basin Restoration Project (OO2) | Isolate waste and tailings at Terrible and Virginus mine site to improve water quality in Governor Creek, Sneffels Creek, and Canyon Creek. | Planned: 2024 - 2025 | \$1,200,000 | Natural Resources Damage Fund, CO Water Conservation Board, UWP general fund, EPA, Thorin Resources | EPA, Trout Unlimited, Thorin Resources |

| Project Title | Description & Objective | Project Type & Timeline | Estimated Total Cost | Existing or Potential Funding Sources | Partners |
|---|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Cow Creek stream gage fish barrier renovation (OO2) | Remove concrete and replace with boulders to enhance fish passage at the stream gage | Potential: 2024 | <\$100,000 | UWP sustainable recreation funds, Gunnison Gorge Anglers, CO Water Conservation Board | Gunnison Gorge Anglers, CO Parks & Wildlife, CO Water Conservation Board, CO Div. of Natural Resources |
| Ridgway river corridor projects (OO2) | Assist in the prioritization, selection, and implementation of projects to improve the Uncompahgre River corridor near Ridgway. | Potential: 2024-2028 | TBD | Town of Ridgway, Great Outdoors CO | Town of Ridgway, U.S. Bur. of Land Management, private landowners |
| Red Mountain Creek Watershed Plan update (OO1) | Update the Uncompahgre Watershed Plan to more fully describe past and current conditions in Red Mountain Creek and identify potential actions to improve water quality. | Potential: 2025-2026 | TBD | UWP general fund, Ouray County | |
| Ironton wetland restoration (OO2) | Complete characterization and project design to implement process-based restoration to improve wetland vegetation and water quality. | Potential: 2024 - 2028 | TBD | U.S. Forest Service, Ouray County | U.S. Forest Service, Ouray County, ORRCA ⁸ , Newmont Mining |
| Idarado Consent Decree outreach (OO2) | Encourage progress to meet water quality improvements in Red Mountain Creek as required in the Idarado Consent Decree | Potential: 2024 - 2028 | TBD | Town of Ridgway and Ouray County, UWP general fund | Newmont Mining, EPA, CO Department of Public Health & Environment |
| Growing Water Smart (OO3) | Collaborate with Ridgway to implement action items developed at the Growing Water Smart Workshop. | Potential: 2024 - 2028 | TBD | Ridgway, UWP general fund, Sonoran Institute, CO River District | Town of Ridgway, Sonoran Institute |

| Project Title | Description & Objective | Project Type & Timeline | Estimated Total Cost | Existing or Potential Funding Sources | Partners |
|--|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Support efforts to improve water quantity for diverse uses (OO2) | Projects may include instream flow studies, irrigation infrastructure improvements, education, or modifications to water management practices | Potential: 2024 - 2028 | TBD | TBD | TBD |
| Uncompahgre River headwaters watershed priority projects (OO2) | Summarize existing data to identify potential water quality improvement projects on USFS lands. | Potential: 2024 - 2028 | TBD | U.S. Forest Service, EPA, CO Division of Reclamation Mining & Safety, CO Department of Public Health & Environment | U.S. Forest Service, Trout Unlimited |
| Corbett Creek bridge and culvert replacement project (OO2) | Improve function of creek by encouraging science-based design of a new bridge or culvert and possibly adding amenities at the trailhead. | Planned: 2024 - 2026 | TBD | Ouray County, Federal (IRA, BIL) | Ouray County, U.S. Army Corps |
| Uncompahgre River improvements at Billy Creek (OO2) | Enhance stream habitat and “fishability” of the Billy Creek reach of the Uncompahgre River. | Planned: 2024 - 2026 | TBD | TU Gunnison Gorge Anglers, CO Parks & Wildlife | TU Gunnison Gorge Anglers, CO Parks & Wildlife |

THEORETICAL PROJECTS

Theoretical Projects have one or more of the following outstanding challenges including lower probability of completion in five years, undetermined level of landowner support, staff capacity concerns, unlikely or undetermined sources of funding, undefined or less defined project parameters, costs and or outcome.

| Project Title | Description & Objective | Timeline | Estimated Total Cost | Existing or Potential Funding Sources | Partners |
|--|--|-----------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Lake Como characterization (OO1) | Gather & analyze water quality data to determine reclamation needs; Lake Como & Uncompahgre Headwaters Watershed | 2026 - 2027 | <\$10,000 | CO Division of Reclamation Mining & Safety, local governments | U.S. Forest Service, EPA, CO Division of Reclamation Mining & Safety, U.S. Bur. of Land Management |
| Boater takeouts on the Uncompahgre River (OO2) | Dennis Weaver Park or other locations to improve boater access, safety, and to reduce impacts from erosion and visitor use | 2025 - 2027 | TBD | Federal, CO Parks & Wildlife, Town of Ridgway, CO Water Conservation Board, U.S. Bur. of Land Management | Ouray County Regional Recreation & Conservation Alliance, American Whitewater, Town of Ridgway, CO Parks & Wildlife |
| Education about streams eligible for designation as Wild & Scenic Rivers in the GMUG Forest Plan (OO3) | Promote preservation of the designated areas along the Uncompahgre River gorge, Bear Creek, Canyon Creek, Cow Creek, and Red Mountain Creek. | 2024 - 2026 | TBD | UWP sustainable recreation funds | U.S. Forest Service, Great Old Broads, American Whitewater, Outdoor Alliance |
| Habitat restoration at Pa-Co-Chu-Puk, Ridgway State Park (OO2) | Enhance trout habitat, improve fishability by restoring stream habitat | TBD | TBD | Gunnison Gorge Anglers, TBD | CPW, Ridgway State Park, BOR, GGA |
| Increase flows in the Unc. River from Ridgway Dam to Montrose (OO2) | Improve winter flows and habitat conditions by increasing winter reservoir releases. | 2027 - 2028 | TBD | Gunnison Gorge Anglers, Trout Unlimited, CO Parks & Wildlife | Bur. of Reclamation, Unc. Valley Water Users Assoc., Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, the three listed funders |

