

River Watch Items for the July 2024 UWP Board Meeting

- River Watch items of interest:
 - The summer sampling schedule commenced in June with nutrient and metals samples collected at 12 of 15 sites. Of the three new TMDL sites, only the Below Atlas Mill site was accessible.
 - The Governor Basin TMDL sampling site was changed to a location on the Governor Basin Road where the stream crosses the road, and the site was sampled for the first time on July 1st. The new Mineral Creek site could not be reached due to the Engineer Pass Rd being closed because of rockslides. July sampling is expected to be completed by July 7th.
- Snowpack, Precipitation and Streamflow:
 - The snowpacks at the Idarado and Red Mountain Pass SNOTEL sites were gone by the 6th of June.
 - A significant amount of rain fell in the watershed at the end of June and beginning of July. Precipitation gauges at Ironton and Governor Basin recorded over 5 inches of rain between June 20th and July 2nd.
 - Streamflow from snowmelt runoff at the USGS gauge near Ridgway had a peak of about 1000 cfs on the 7th of June. Streamflow peaks greater than 1200 cfs were recorded with the rainfall that occurred after June 20th. As of July 3rd, the Uncompahgre near Ridgway had a discharge of ~400 cfs, about equal to the median discharge for that date.

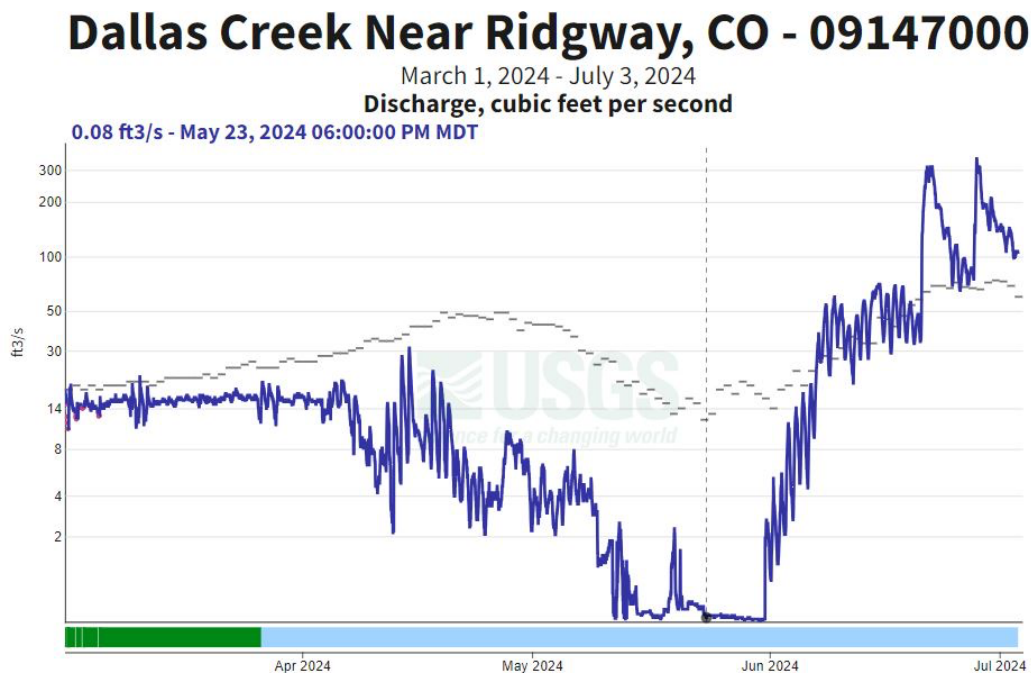


Figure 1. Dark blue line shows discharge on Dallas Creek between March 1st and July 3rd, 2024. Median discharge values are shown by the dashed line segments. The vertical dashed line marks the date (May 23rd) when the CWCB made a call on their Instream Flow right.

- The discharge at the Dallas Creek gauge from March 1st to early July is shown in Figure 1. There was a period of about two weeks in May when the streamflow was less than 2 cfs, often recorded as less than 0.1 cfs. The issue of very low flow in May was resolved when the main

runoff period began near the 1st of June. Discharge increased up to the median curve and has remained at or above median values since about June 8th. Flow peaks of 300 cfs were recorded after the rainfall events in late June.

- The low flow on Dallas Creek initiated a call by CWCB on their Instream Flow right on the lowest 7.2 mile segment of Dallas Creek. The three attached emails below show the questions I asked CWCB about the call process, and their responses. In the initial response from Rob Viehl he notes that some users were taking more than their decreed amounts. In a conversation I had with the Ouray County water commissioner, he verified that diversions of about 4.6 cfs were more than decreed amounts during the time the creek was running very low. The other interesting thing Rob Viehl pointed out was that, once the CWCB call was made, other senior right holders began diverting water. Rob noted, as I originally thought, that the increase in flow beginning around the 1st of June was due to normal runoff, not the CWCB call.

Email exchanges between Arlen Huggins and CWCB. **Red fonts in the emails below were added by me.**

Email to Rob Viehl, CWCB, Chief of Stream and Lake Protection Section

11 June 2024

Hello Rob,

My name is Arlen Huggins. I'm on the board of the Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership (UWP) in Ridgway, CO, and also the UWP lead volunteer with our River Watch program. We've been closely watching Dallas Creek this spring as it nearly went dry when irrigation season started in April. I had a conversation with the Ouray County water commissioner in late May when flow got down to less than 1 cfs. He said CWCB was about to place a call on their ISF right, and in fact that happened on 5/23/24.

I'm wondering if you could answer a few questions about how this process works. Is the "call" made through the water commissioner? How is the call communicated to the water users on Dallas Creek? At the time of the Dallas Creek ISF call there were no other calls on Dallas Creek (that I could find). Does this mean the ISF call had priority and upstream diversions had to be curtailed? Or, if an upstream user had an older water right could they ignore the ISF call and continue to divert water? Or, can an older right holder make a call of their own to "override" the ISF call?

Shortly after the 5/23 call Dallas Cr flow began to increase and was actually up to 60 cfs on 6/9. Not sure how much of this was due to the ISF call. I think this was mostly the main seasonal runoff as the Uncompahgre also reached its peak flow at the same time.

Thanks in advance for any information you can give me.

Email from Rob Viehl, CWCB, Chief of Stream and Lake Protection Section

3 July 2024

Arlen:

Thank you for these questions and sorry for my slow response. The CWCB did request administration of the Dallas Creek instream flow water right on 5/23/2024. This resulted in the water commissioner putting a "call" on the system. The Dallas Creek ISF right is pretty junior on the system with a priority from 1998. This "call" resulted in curtailment of any diversions junior to this date and also for any undecreed uses occurring. **It was our understanding at the time that there were several senior**

water rights taking more than their decreed amounts which is why we requested administration. There were no other calls on the system at that time except for the one by the CWCB. While requesting administration caused curtailment of those undecreed uses the flow in the river at the gage didn't increase. Once the "call" was put on Dallas Creek other senior water users commenced diverting water senior to the ISF. The rise in the gage you see on 6/9 is a result of runoff conditions and not the CWCB call. I have added Brandy Logan onto this email chain since she monitors the conditions in this area and might provide additional information that I have missed. If you have more questions we would be happy to set-up a time to speak.

Email from Brandy Logan, CWCB, Water Resource Specialist, Stream and Lake Protection Section

3 July 2024

Hi Arlen,

Thank you for reaching out. I can add a couple of things. One, senior water users to the ISF do not need to place call to water when the ISF is calling. They can just start diverting, which is their right. Secondly, I believe that the water commissioner texts junior water users or senior water users that are diverting more than their decreed rights to let them know a call is on. Feel free to reach out if you have any questions. Happy to know others are watching out for the river.

Brandy Logan