



3264 Larimer Street, Suite D
Denver, CO 80205
720.570.2897 | www.ColoradoWaterTrust.org



2220 Curve Plaza, Suite 201
Steamboat Springs, CO 80487
970.871.1035 | www.upperyampawater.com

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For more information, contact:

Dana Dallavalle
Colorado Water Trust
Phone: 720-570-2897
Email: ddallavalle@coloradowatertrust.org

Holly Kirkpatrick
Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District
Phone: 970-439-1081
Email: HKirkpatrick@upperyampawater.com

Stagecoach Reservoir Releases to Bolster Yampa River Flows

Steamboat Springs, Co., (July 26, 2021) – On Monday July 26th, Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District (UYWCD) began releasing water purchased by Colorado Water Trust (Water Trust) at a rate of 20 cubic feet per second (cfs) from Stagecoach Reservoir to bolster flows in the Yampa River.

Since 2012, the Water Trust has purchased and released over 12,000 acre-feet of water into the Yampa River from Stagecoach Reservoir at a cost of \$496,104. Earlier this month, UYWCD and the Water Trust finalized a contract for the purchase of 1000 acre-feet of water in Stagecoach Reservoir with an option to purchase an additional 1000 acre-feet if needed. The Water Trust's purchase will improve river health during the exceptional drought conditions across the Yampa River basin this year. The initial purchase cost is \$45,560. The Water Trust raised well over \$100,000 to support the purchase of stored water in Stagecoach and Elkhead Reservoirs as needed in 2021, including a \$90,585 grant from the Yampa River Fund.

"Our team is hard at work collaborating with partners and devising solutions to support the Yampa River this year. We are grateful the Yampa basin community understands that a rising tide lifts all boats. Each year, across the state, the need for this kind of innovation and cooperation increases as our water supply is more stressed," Andy Schultheiss, Colorado Water Trust Executive Director.

Exceptional drought conditions this year led to flows far below average and closures on the Yampa River below Stagecoach early in the year. When river temperatures spiked above 75 degrees several days last week, the Water Trust made the call to begin releasing their purchased water at the initial rate of 20 cfs. The Water Trust releases will help reduce water temperature and maintain healthy streamflow. UYWCD





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has already voluntarily released over 1600 acre-feet of its stored water to support Yampa River flows this year.

“The collaboration of trusted partners like the Water Trust keeps water flowing in the Yampa River system when drought conditions might not otherwise allow it,” says Holly Kirkpatrick, UYWCD Public Information and External Affairs Manager. “A lot of work goes on behind the scenes to ensure that water supply is available, funding is secured, and legal mechanisms are in place to release water that benefits all users and the environment.”

The Water Trust and UYWCD are working together on longer-term solutions to support the Yampa River during low flows. The Water Trust and UYWCD intend to utilize Colorado House Bill 20-1157, passed in 2020, by filing a joint application to the Colorado Water Conservation Board’s (CWCB) Instream Flow and Natural Lake Level Program. Effective March 2021, amended rules governing the program created additional tools for the temporary loan of water rights for instream flow use, including the ability to further support the natural environment via loan renewals for up to three 10-year periods and potentially increased flow rates. Renewable loans through the program could allow environmental releases to bolster flows in the Yampa River for up to 15 out of 30 years if needed. Legislation previously only allowed for loaned water to be used for instream flow in 3 out of 10 years and were not renewable.

Essential to the project’s success in 2021 are Colorado Water Trust’s dedicated donors: The Yampa River Fund, Yampa Valley Community Foundation, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Lyda Hill Foundation, and individual donors as well as key project partners: The City of Steamboat Springs; Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District; Catamount Development, Inc.; Catamount Metropolitan District; Colorado Parks and Wildlife; Colorado Water Conservation Board; and the Colorado Division of Water Resources. Without these generous donations and the collaborative work of numerous local and statewide entities, water releases to support the health of the Yampa River would not be possible.

