



## COLORADO WATER TRUST

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### Reservoir Releases to Bolster Yampa River Flows

Steamboat Springs, Co., (August 12, 2020) – On Wednesday August 12<sup>th</sup>, Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District (UYWCD) began releasing water purchased by the City of Steamboat Springs (City) to bolster flows in the Yampa River from Stagecoach Reservoir to the City’s waste water treatment plant. The City hopes the release of 350 acre-feet will help keep temperatures in the Yampa River below the daily maximum of 23.9°C. In addition to the release of stored water purchased by the City, UYWCD initiated its annual draw-down of Stagecoach Reservoir. The draw-down will slowly release 1000 acre-feet of water through September 30<sup>th</sup>. UYWCD is also contracting a lease of stored water to Colorado Water Trust (the Water Trust). The Water Trust received grant funds for the purchase of water out of Stagecoach Reservoir through the Yampa River Fund and other donors earlier this year and will partner with the City to ensure its releases are delivered to the City’s waste water treatment plant for in-river use. The Water Trust anticipates finalizing their contract for the purchase of 500 acre-feet later this week, with an option to purchase additional water if needed, up to a total of 4,000 acre-feet in 2020. Releases of water purchased by the Water Trust are intended to improve river health and enhance flows during this year’s hot summer months. The Water Trust and UYWCD are working together on longer-term solutions to support the Yampa River during low flows, including the potential to utilize House Bill 20-1157 passed this year, thanks to its prime sponsors Representative Dylan Roberts, Senator Kerry Donovan, and Representative Perry Will, which may allow a longer-term contract for water leases.

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*“Voluntary projects that compensate water rights owners and restore flow to rivers are flexible and can be tailored to meet local values. This project on the Yampa is a great example - so many people have contributed to the success of the project over the years. We’re really encouraged that the District is interested in exploring longer-term solutions,”* says Mickey O’Hara, Program Director for the Water Trust.

This is the seventh year in the past nine years that the Water Trust leased water out of Stagecoach Reservoir for release to the Yampa River to help maintain healthy streamflow and water temperatures. Leases since 2012 have resulted in over 11,000 acre-feet of water being released to the Yampa River. The Water Trust relies on streamflow forecasting and historical data to determine how much water to lease in any given year. Operation of the release project is supported by a dedicated group of community partners that support the Water Trust’s efforts to support healthier flows in the Yampa River.

*“The great success of this partnership is that a collaborative community effort results in the release of water into the Yampa River system to benefit all users. The many legal and policy mechanisms that allow for these releases deliver tangible benefits for the river,”* says Andy Rossi, General Manager of Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District.

As high temperatures and some level of drought currently impact the entire state, many of Colorado’s rivers are running short on water, including the Yampa River. Water administration is common around the state, including the Bear River in South Routt County, and basin residents can expect to see more administration on the Yampa River below Stagecoach Reservoir as drought continues. Low flows and temperature spikes in the river can also lead to recreational closures on the river and can impact fish populations. Collaboration among project partners is essential to keeping water in the river when there simply isn’t enough to go around.

*“Our river works hard for us. It grows our food, it makes our power, it provides our drinking water, and it treats our wastewater. This release is a small way to give water back to the river and its wildlife when they need it most,”* says Kelly Romero-Heaney, Water Resources Manager for the City of Steamboat Springs.

Essential to the Yampa project’s success are dedicated 2020 donors: The Yampa River Fund; Tri-State Generation and Transmission; April Fund; and Patagonia; 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; and the Colorado Division of Water Resources. Without these generous donations and the collaborative work of local and state agencies, water releases to support the health of the Yampa River would not be possible.

*“The Yampa River Fund was created in part to help support flows in the Yampa during these increasingly dry years. We are pleased that the Fund could be part of this important partnership in its first year of operation and will be here to help keep the Yampa healthy into the future,”* says Andy Baur, Yampa River Fund Manager.



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**ABOUT COLORADO WATER TRUST:** Colorado Water Trust is a statewide nonprofit organization that works collaboratively with partners all across Colorado on restoring flow to Colorado's rivers in need using solutions that benefit both the people we work with and our rivers. Since 2001, we've restored 12 billion gallons of water to rivers and streams across the state.

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