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Long-Term Environmental, Instream, and Recreational Water Storage Contract Approved for Stagecoach Reservoir

Steamboat Springs, Co., (November 18, 2021) – On Wednesday November 17th, the Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District (UYWCD) board of directors approved a 10-year contract with the Colorado Water Trust (Water Trust) for the purchase of stored water in Stagecoach Reservoir. The water supply contract, deemed for environmental, instream and recreational use, is the first long-term contract that extends beyond temporary one-year contracts between UYWCD and the Water Trust in years past.

Since 2012, the Water Trust has purchased and released 14,500 acre-feet of water into the Yampa River from Stagecoach Reservoir. Water Trust releases help maintain healthy streamflow and water temperature from Stagecoach Reservoir downstream through the City of Steamboat Springs during hot and dry summer months.

Historically, UYWCD and the Water Trust have worked together to negotiate contract terms as needed on an annual basis using state legislation that allowed for environmental water releases to be loaned for instream flow use in 3 out every 10 years.

In 2020, Colorado House Bill 20-1157 was passed, allowing for the establishment of amended rules governing the Colorado Water Conservation Board's (CWCB) Instream Flow and Natural Lake Level Program, previously governed by the 3 in 10 rule. Effective March 17, 2021, the amended rules provide potential for increased flow rates and expand the temporary loan of water rights for instream flow use from 3 years to 5 years out of every 10 in addition to potential loan renewals for up to three 10-year periods.





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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.

For the past year, UYWCD and the Water Trust have been working towards a longer-term contract that could help support the Yampa River during low flows and utilize the new state legislation. The new 10-year contract ensures 100 acre-feet of water in the general supply pool of Stagecoach Reservoir will be allocated to the Water Trust each year if supply is available. The contract also allows for the Water Trust to purchase additional water from two other contract pools in Stagecoach Reservoir at various volumes as needed. Payment for water contracted outside of the general supply pool will only be collected if the water is released.

“As drought conditions and water scarcity continue to challenge our basin, having this 10-year contract in place will help minimize some of the recurring challenges we typically face each year when we revisit temporary contracts without constraining UYWCD water supplies or Water Trust funds. Developing longer-term solutions frees up time and money for all our partners to be even more innovative in their collaboration to keep the river flowing,” said Andy Rossi, General Manager of the Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District.

UYWCD and the Water Trust will be one of the first in the state to utilize the newly amended statute and rules when they present the 10-year contract as part of their joint application to the CWCB program, which is anticipated to take place in January of 2022. Following completion of the CWCB application review, UYWCD and the Water Trust hope to secure a loan of water rights for instream flow use by spring of 2022, making the first 10-year contract effective through 2032.

“UYWCD and the Water Trust have forged something new here. It’s a big step forward for the Yampa River Project and collaborative water management in general. We can now focus our efforts on the new instream flow loan application, and if we are successful, to expanding the Project’s benefits downstream of the instream flow reach where it can benefit even more of the river and all those who rely upon it,” commented Alyson Meyer Gould, Staff Attorney for the Water Trust.

The success of the Yampa River Project involves many partners and dedicated donors including: The Yampa River Fund, Yampa Valley Community Foundation, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, 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.

