

**South Fork Republican Restoration Coalition:
Stream Management and Restoration Planning Project
Public Meeting**

March 20, 2019

5—6:30 pm

Idalia, Colorado

A meeting to share initial findings and hear feedback from the public drew about 50 people to the Idalia School.

Brief Introduction of the Coalition and the Project

As at previous public meetings, members of the Coalition were on hand to review the goals of the project and to answer questions. Yuma County Commissioner Robin Wiley provided a brief introduction. He was joined by Kit Carson County Commissioner Dave Hornung and Republican River Water Conservation District's president Rod Lenz. Wiley reminded those present that the SFRRRC (South Fork Republican Restoration Coalition) is a grassroots effort to seek improvements to the channel of the South Fork Republican River. Coalition members include Three Rivers Alliance, the counties of Yuma and Kit Carson, the Republican River Water Conservation District, The Nature Conservancy and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The coalition received a \$99,000.00 grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board to develop an improvement plan for the stretch of the river from Flagler to the state line, with a focus area consisting of the river reach from a few miles west of Highway 385 to Bonny Dam. The Nature Conservancy contributed a matching amount to the project.

Darlene Carpio from Senator Cory Gardner's office reported to the group that Senator Gardner had met with BOR Commissioner Brenda Burman to encourage the BOR to work with the SFRRRC and support its grassroots efforts.

Progress Report from Technical Team Consultants

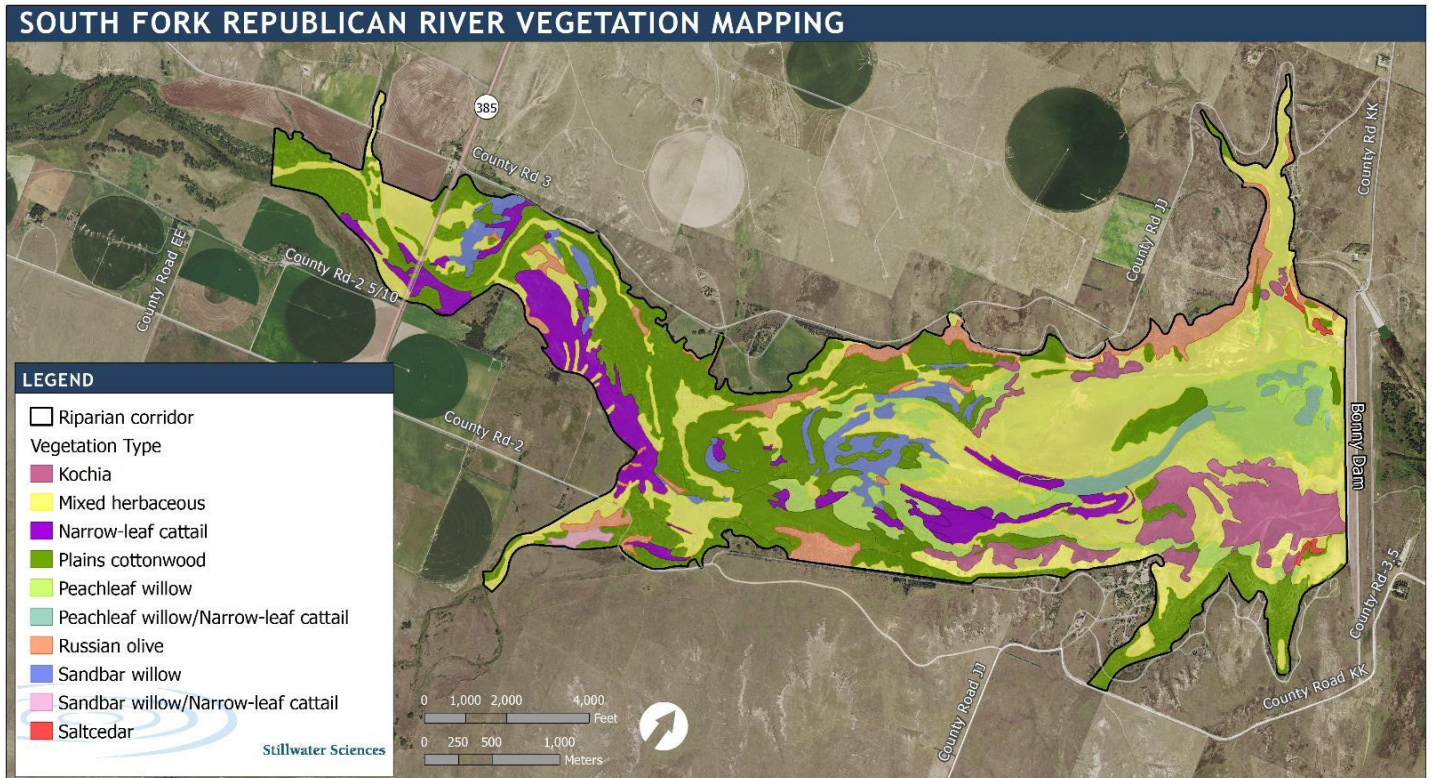
Project manager Nancy Smith, from The Nature Conservancy, introduced members of the technical team including Julie Ash and AJ Keith from Stillwater Sciences and Brian Clarke from OTAK. She emphasized that underlying all of the technical work is keen attention to the "balancing act" that complicates this project—the need to consider all aspects simultaneously:

- Compact Compliance
- Irrigation
- Wildlife/Riparian Corridor
- Recreation

The three consultants shared initial findings, outlined work yet to be done, and presented three concepts that are emerging from their work. Key points made include:

- To better understand the riparian forest ecological system in the focus area, consultants have created a map of dominant vegetation types, and evaluated both shallow soil composition and surface water flow. They collected aerial and topography information.
- Water flow in the system is not sufficient to move sediment. More water moving down a gradient is needed to address the sediment issue. When Bonny was built, there was more gradient and much less vegetation, which allowed for greater flow of water. Water use by humans, primarily related to agriculture, has also changed. Sediment has flattened the gradient and vegetation has dissipated the energy of the water flowing through the focus area.
- Some of the opportunities include:
 - Recreating the channel where sediment and vegetation are dissipating the streamflow

- Restoring aquatic habitat
- Removing invasive species such as cattail, kochia, tamarisk and Russian olive.
- Creating small ponds, each less than 15 acre-feet in size.
- Managing the sediment and reducing the curvature of the river channel
- Cattail management will reduce the roughness of the channel.
- Sediment traps could be put in the North Sand Creek and other tributary streams to stop or slow down sediment entering into the system.



Three Concepts Emerging

Consultants emphasized there are no silver bullets to solve the problems. Potential approaches are emerging, each with their own opportunities and constraints. They will be evaluated further, each in the light of balancing the needs of compact compliance, irrigation, riparian corridor restoration for wildlife, and recreation. Cost—and return on investment considerations—will certainly be a factor.

An in-depth description of each of the three concepts under consideration can be found on the project website, www.republicanriver.com. In a nutshell, the three approaches, from most costly to least, can be categorized as:

- 1) Add multiple new culverts/pipes through dam to lower inlet/outlet elevations to increase gradient, and re-create a continuous river channel through the former reservoir bed
- 2) Add additional inlet upstream of former reservoir where perennial or intermittent flow can be captured and pipe base flow to existing 56" pipe at dam, lower inlet at dam to capture high flow backwater at dam, enhance/restore existing perennial/intermittent channel, and extend perennial channel downstream of its current terminus
- 3) Lower existing inlet to elevation of 56" intake pipe and excavate surrounding area to lower back water pooling

Recreation Economics Analysis

Deb Daniels, manager of RRWCD, reported that a draft analysis had just been submitted to the coalition from CHM, the results of which will be factored in when considering which approach to take. CHM's Margaret Bailey spent three days investigating opportunities and participated in a public meeting specific to this topic that was held in late January. Activities included in the draft report include camping, OHV and ATV trails, hiking, horseback riding, small water recreation, bird watching, etc.

Public Dialogue

MaryLou Smith from CSU's Colorado Water Center facilitated public dialogue to help inform the technical team and to give them an opportunity to answer questions. Questions/dialogue included:

- Brad Grasmick, attorney for CAPA, asked what approach would have the most impact to base flow of the stream flows at the state line gage. Rod Lenz answered that any of the approaches would greatly enhance streamflow.
- Dave Keeler expressed an opinion that lowering the trash rack of the outlet works would not encourage more streamflow due to the bottleneck of the plumbing under the dam.
- CAPA's Joe Newton expressed that while habitat improvement is important, most important is improving "human habitat", presumably by prioritizing water for irrigation. Upstream of Bonny there is concern with water being cut off from irrigation.
- Greg Devlin asked how many tributaries there are from Hwy 385 to the dam. Brian Clarke reported that there are three tributaries in or near the focus area (but only one, Landsman Creek, in the reach from 385 to the dam) and they bring in an enormous amount of sediment. Both Julie Ash and Clarke talked about various sediment traps that could help to control sediment moving into the channel. Devlin supported the idea of sediment traps near Sand Creek, west of his house.
- Verlin McDonald stated that "we don't have big rain events like we did in the past." He lamented the loss of beavers that used to be a benefit to the ecological system, but moved out in the 1980—1990's. The resulting overgrowth of trees has allowed for more predators, decreasing the number of fish in the river.
- An individual who helped construct the reservoir emphasized the need to restore recreation to the area—to create something to attract visitors to the site.

Next Steps

Nancy Smith stated that next, the technical team will continue to flesh out these initial concepts, and work to align them with the recreational economics analysis. She encouraged those in attendance to view the slides from the meeting on the project website. Robin Wiley closed out the meeting by encouraging everyone to reach out to any member of the SFRRC to share their input.

The next public meeting will be held in August or September.