



Promoting the Wise Use  
of all Natural Resources

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**The Land and Natural Resources Plan and Policies**

**Working for Rio Blanco County**

The Districts continue to utilize the Land and Natural Resources Plan and Policies (Plan) to provide input on federal land management agencies' planning processes. District staff participate in BLM National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) meetings on a weekly basis. In 2020, written comments have been submitted quoting policies from the plan on the following issues:

- National BLM Grazing Regulations
- Local BLM Grazing Permit Renewals
- U.S. Forest Service Yellow Jacket Timber Harvest Project
- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations
- Northwest Colorado Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Greater Sage Grouse Conservation
- Multiple Letters and Requests for Removal of Excess Horses from Rio Blanco County
- Vegetation Treatments

Please contact the District Office for copies of these comments or with any questions.



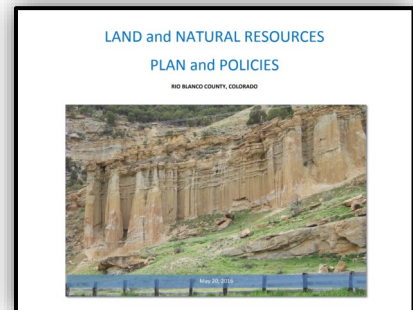
*The White River near Rangely, Colorado*



*A large herd of wild horses in western RBC*



*Male Greater Sage Grouse*



*The Plan & Policies Booklet*

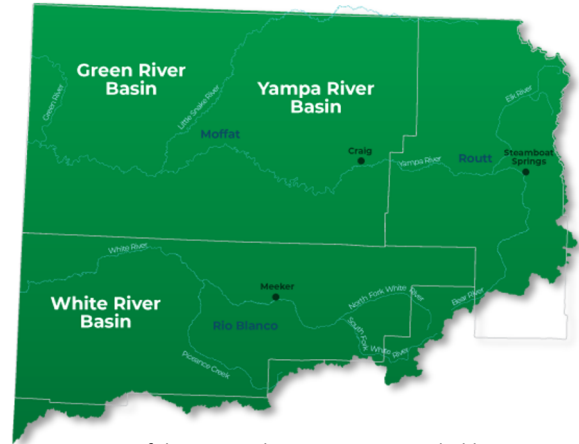
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# Protecting Water Quality and Quantity in Rio Blanco County

## Yampa-White-Green Basin Roundtable

Districts' Executive Director, Callie Hendrickson, serves on the Yampa-White-Green Basin Roundtable (BRT) as the Senate & House Appointee. She is active on the "Big River Committee" which is currently focused on Demand Management (DM) and is evaluating the concept of "equitable apportionment for demand management". Current conversations are exploring "Shared Responsibility" and "Guided Market" vs. "Free Market." Much discussion is being had regarding if the BRT should develop a position statement on DM or wait and respond to what the State comes up with. A presentation made by State Engineer, Kevin Rein, regarding Compact Compliance Strategy is on the water tab of the [Districts' website](#). Key takeaways are that the State will continue to plan for a compact call in the future, but there is a very low probability that there will be a call on the Colorado River within the next five years.



A map of the area in the YWG Basin Roundtable

## White River Integrated Water Initiative (Initiative)

A project specific newsletter was sent out in November 2020 (also posted on the [Districts' website](#) on the Initiative tab) which included details on this process. Developing from local input and the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC), the mission statement and four overall river goals have been proposed for current and future generations involved with the White River.

Mission Statement: A community-based initiative to identify action promoting a healthy river that ensures a vibrant agricultural community and maintains healthy fisheries while protecting water rights, quantity, and quality with respect for the local customs, cultures, and property rights.

### Overall Goals

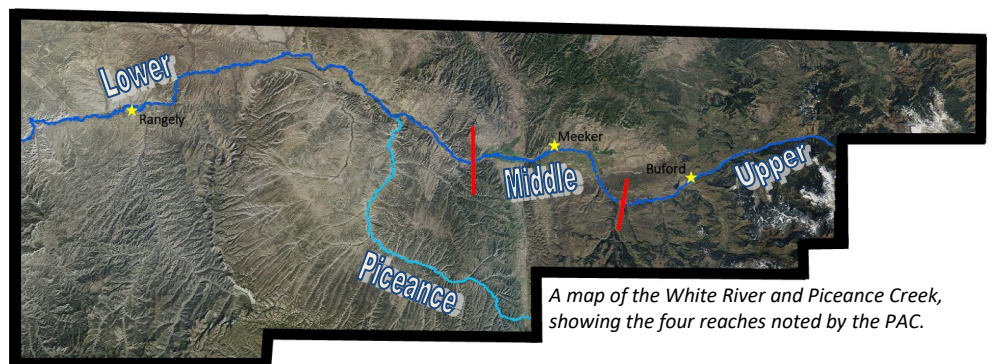
1) Protect and preserve existing water rights and other beneficial water uses.

2) Protect and enhance water quantity and quality through promoting best management practices for:

- A) Forest Health
- B) Riparian Health
- C) Rangeland Health
- D) Favorable Conditions of Streamflow

3) Identify opportunities for creation or improvement of infrastructure to support efficient consumptive and non-consumptive uses.

4) Support the development and maintenance of efficient and necessary long-term storage solutions that will improve, enhance, and ensure irrigation, river health, water quantity, water quality, and native and recreational fisheries.



A map of the White River and Piceance Creek, showing the four reaches noted by the PAC.

## White River Algae Study

The White River Algae Study began in 2018 to document and understand benthic algal occurrence, characteristics, and controls at multiple locations within the White River above Meeker. The Technical Advisory Group (TAG), who oversees the Study, heard an update from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) in December on their 2020 data collection. Their Power Point presentation can be found on the Algae Study tab of the Districts' [website](#). Overall, the USGS has seen increases in phosphorus, and to a smaller degree nitrogen, concentrations and loads at mainstem and tributary sites during the last 20 years. Nutrient availability and physical disturbance during high streamflow may play a large role in controlling algal blooms. It was extremely valuable to have a very low flow year (2018) and a rather high flow year (2019) to consider in the study.

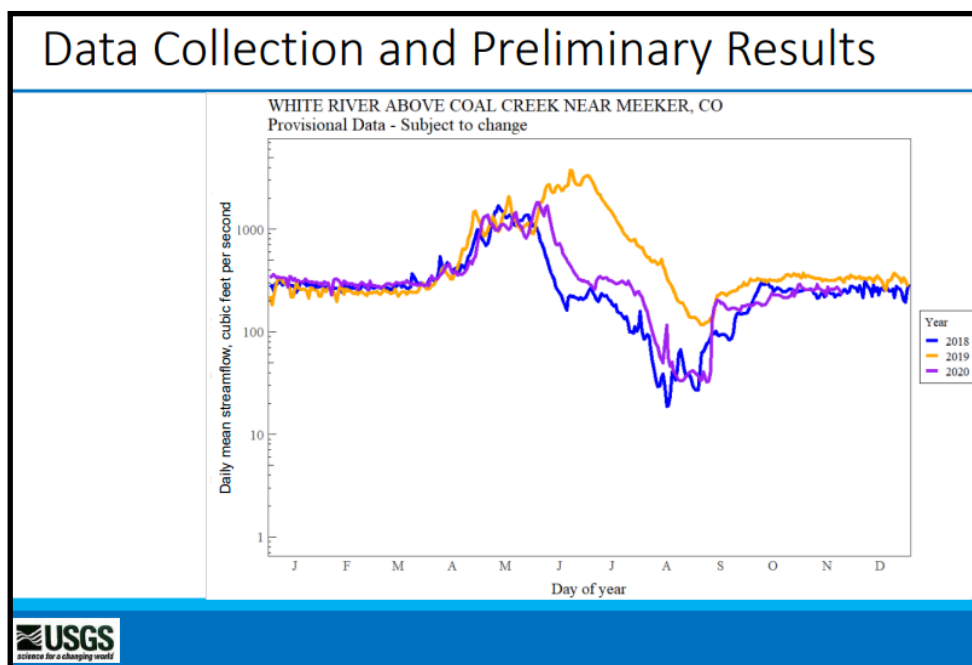
New data collection of physical, chemical, and biological factors include:

- High-flow condition measurements
- Channel surveys, grain size analysis, continuous water quality monitoring
- Water-quality sampling
- Algae sampling (Chlorophyll *a* and taxonomy)
- Isotope sampling (nitrogen source analysis)
- Nutrient load/ source area analysis



White River rock covered with algae from near Sleepy Cat. Photo taken by CPW.

Following the 2018 Cabin Lake Fire, Spring 2019 sampling events showed the total nitrogen to total phosphorous ratio at the South Fork site (directly below the fire) was elevated in 2019 relative to 2020, signifying a greater nitrogen export following the burn. The USGS reported progressively lower algae concentrations in the river from 2018 to 2020. Trout Unlimited (TU) and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) have finished their water temperature and taxonomy (bug) analysis to be included in the USGS' final report. All data collected will be used in a model to identify which factors influence algae. USGS expects to have the first draft of the final report out by Summer 2021.



A USGS graph showing the daily stream flow of the White River near Coal Creek over a three year span (2018-blue; 2019-yellow; 2020- purple). Graphs and charts are used with permission from the USGS. The full presentation can be found on the Districts' website on the [Algae Study tab](#).

The Districts appreciate the local landowners, local governments, Colorado State Conservation Board, Colorado Water Conservation Board, and Colorado Parks & Wildlife for their funds that assist in the progress of this study.

## Monitoring and Improving Rangelands in Rio Blanco County



*A range cage utilized during monitoring in the Piceance– East Douglas Area.*

- Range Monitoring and Weed Spraying:

In partnership with the BLM, three years of comprehensive range monitoring on 200,000 acres, in the Piceance– East Douglas Herd Management Area (PEDHMA), is providing great scientific data verifying what species are using the forage and at what time of the year. The mapping and spraying of noxious weeds helps improve the forage and reduce s the spread of unwanted species in the area.

- Coordinated Resource Management Plans (CRMP):

CRMP's combine voluntary efforts and resources from the Districts, private landowners/ managers, BLM, and other interested partners (State and Federal agencies and Non-Government Organizations) who are interested in achieving common goals to improve the land and water resources. District staff and partners are committed to seeking funding opportunities to implement on-the-ground conservation practices. Common projects across all existing CRMPs are brush management and water distribution / improvement projects. Two CRMP's were completed in 2020 and three more are in various stages of completion. If you are a public land permittee and are interested in signing up for this program, please contact the Districts' Office.



*CRMP Ranch Tour with a local producer and other partnering agencies.*



### Wild (Feral) Horses

The Piceance– East Douglas Herd Management Area (HMA) encompasses 190,130 total acres, of which 158,310 acres are managed by the BLM, 26,490 acres are private, and 5,330 acres are managed by the State of Colorado. The Appropriate Management Level (AML) for the HMA is 135-235 horses. The estimated population of horses within the HMA is 838, with over 1,400 total horses in the county at this time. The Districts have worked tirelessly with the BLM at the Local, State, and National levels to encourage the removal of all excess horses from the County. Multiple letters and phone calls are made on a monthly basis and we will continue all efforts to support management of horses within the AML in an effort to protect the health of the range and the horses.

*Top: Rangeland heavily used by feral horses in western Rio Blanco Co. Picture taken in late June 2020.*

*Bottom: Feral horses in western Rio Blanco County, Colorado.*



*Photo: Kendra Young*



*Photo: Kendra Young*

## Staff Updates and Partner Information

### District Conservation Technician (DCT) Update:

Kendra Young joined the Districts and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) team in April 2020 as the DCT. In these few months and with COVID-19 restrictions, she has provided technical assistance to numerous landowners with livestock water and irrigation pipeline implantation, fire mitigation (post-burn), soil samples, easement surveying, grazing plans, CRMP plans, and NRCS programmatic reviews. She will continue working on these types of projects plus working with partners to conduct diversion structure assessments through the White River Integrated Water Initiative this coming year.

Additionally, Kendra assists with providing natural resource information and education outreach. She is available to demonstrate the River Trailer to youth and adults, highlighting the value of healthy riparian areas and how to prevent stream bank erosion. Kendra assists with many of the weekly Conservation Corner articles and maintains the District website and Facebook page with natural resource information.



Left: Kendra and Callie demonstrate the River Trailer at the Rangely Fishing Derby during the summer of 2020.

Bottom: Partner agencies tour and discuss CRMP plans with a local producer.



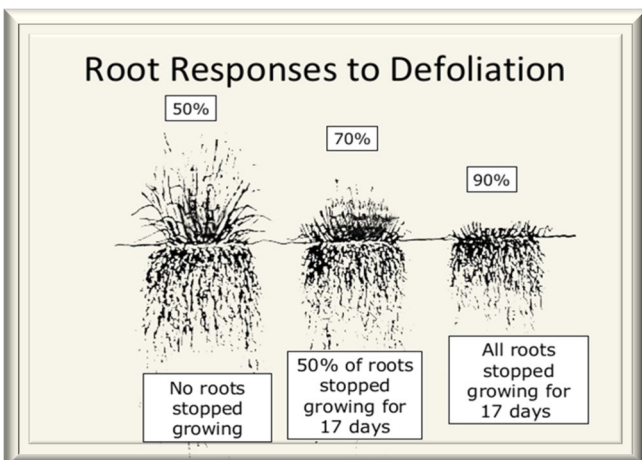
### TAKE HALF, LEAVE HALF

BY: NAKAYLA LESTINA (MEEKER NRCS, RESOURCE CONSERVATIONIST)

The old adage of ‘Take Half, Leave Half’ in the grazing world is a concept used to explain the utilization of forage. Utilization is defined as “the degree to which animals have consumed the total current production of a range area” (Bell, 1978, p. 131). By looking at the utilization of an area, rangeland managers or producers can get an idea of whether the rangeland is being properly used to meet desired livestock goals and sustain the landscape for future use.

Since the time of ‘Take Half, Leave Half,’ there has been a new concept that is being used in conjunction with utilization. This new idea is harvest efficiency. Harvest efficiency is defined as “the total percent of vegetation harvested by a machine or ingested by a grazing animal compared to the total amount of vegetation grown in the area in a given year” (NRPH, 2003). This new concept takes the understanding of utilization a step further because not all vegetation that is utilized on the rangeland is consumed. Some vegetation is destroyed. So, when considering ‘Take Half, Leave Half,’ try to remember that the actual consumption of forage by the livestock is less than 50%. “The general rule of thumb for the 50% utilization is that 25% is ingested by the animal and 25% is wasted through trampling, desiccation, bedding and animal waste” (Green & Brazee, 2012).

As land managers, it is in your best interest to keep the utilization of an area at or below 50% of the current production, otherwise, the root system of the vegetation begins to be impacted. At this 50% level, the root growth begins to stop thus lowering the productivity of the vegetation and the overall sustainability of the land for future use.



#### References:

- Bell, H.M. (1978). *Rangeland Management for Livestock Production*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Green, S and Brazee, B. (2012). *Technical Note: Range No. 73 – Harvest Efficiency in Prescribed Grazing*. Boise, Idaho – Salt Lake City, Utah. USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Kothmann, M. (2013). *How Plants Grow*. <https://www.slideshare.net/nooraasiken/how-plants-grow>.
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2003. *National Range and Pasture Handbook (NRPH)*. Fort Worth, TX: US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Grazing Lands Technology Institute.

Douglas Creek and White River  
 Conservation Districts  
 351 7th Street  
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 Meeker, CO 81641



<p><u>Office Hours and COVID-19 Restrictions</u></p> <p>The Conservation Districts and the NRCS Office are available for service to the landowners. Please call 970-693-3012 (NRCS) or 970-878-9838 (District) before coming to the offices, as they may be closed to the public based on COVID conditions in the County. Thank you for your patience.</p>	<p>The Districts offer numerous conservation-related products for sale and rent including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Livestock water tire tanks</li> <li>• Trees</li> <li>• No-till drill</li> <li>• Broadcast- seeder</li> <li>• PAM</li> </ul> <p>If you are interested in something, contact the Office or visit the Sales &amp; Rentals tab of the <a href="#">Districts' website</a>.</p>
<p><u>District Board Meetings</u></p> <p><b>Douglas Creek Conservation District</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Tuesday of the Month at 6:00 pm</li> <li>• 2253 E. Main Street, Rangely, CO 81648</li> </ul> <p><b>White River Conservation District</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Third Monday of the Month at 5:00 pm (winter hours)</li> <li>• Location TBD, Meeker, CO 81641</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>District Contact Information</u></b></p> <p>970-878-9838</p> <p><a href="mailto:WhiteRiverCD@gmail.com">WhiteRiverCD@gmail.com</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.DouglasCreekCD.org">www.DouglasCreekCD.org</a></p> <p><a href="http://www.WhiteRiverCD.com">www.WhiteRiverCD.com</a></p>