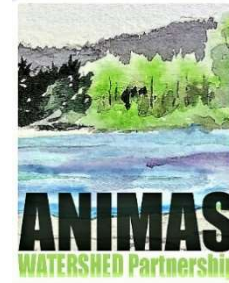


April 11, 2024

Southwest Basins Roundtable
Ed Tolen, Chair

Re: Colorado Water Plan Grant
Watershed Health and Recreation Category
Letter of Support Request for Animas Watershed Partnership



Dear Mr. Tolen,

Animas Watershed Partnership (AWP) is requesting a letter of support from the Southwest Basins Roundtable for our proposal to the Colorado Water Plan Grant in the watershed health and recreation category. AWP, our partners, and stakeholders have expressed support in continuing to develop a watershed plan for the Animas River.

In July 2022, the AWP with participation from community partners and stakeholders and funding through a CWCB Water Plan Grant, began to evaluate the potential for a watershed plan within the Animas River basin. This evaluation was designed to assess community and stakeholder support for initiating the development of a watershed plan herein known as the Animas River Plan (aka Plan). If supported, stakeholders will also develop the scope and scale for the planning process.

In 2022 and 2023, stakeholders convened to begin scoping the Animas River Plan by conducting a data gaps analysis, stakeholder assessment, and identification of priority attributes/areas for a river health assessment (Phase 1-A). The outcomes of this initial phase (Phase 1-A) were a determination that a Plan is currently appropriate and that stakeholders would like to proceed with the development of a Plan for the Animas River. It was determined that the next planning phase should evaluate current conditions while using existing and developing new information where necessary to set target conditions for multiple identified attributes.

Planning (Phase 2-A) is anticipated to begin in early 2025. In the interim of Phase 1-A and 2-A, AWP secured funding for activities in 2024 that will address near-term priorities of stakeholders that are necessary to complete before planning begins; these activities and tasks are covered in Phase 1-B. These include advancing demonstration project designs, integrating with other plans/partner initiatives, and building long-term leadership capacity of AWP.

AWP is pursuing Colorado Water Plan Grant funds for implementation of Phase 2A. AWP and stakeholders have begun the process of developing a scope of work for the grant application. Stakeholders will be meeting in early May to finalize the scope of work and develop a budget. The scope of work purposes the following tasks:

TASK 1 – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT. Ensure stakeholder input is utilized along with scientific analysis to guide the planning and decision-making process for the Plan. The primary objective is to utilize stakeholder outcomes from Phase 1-A and 1-B to better understand where opportunities and constraints exist within the pre-defined watershed boundaries. The goal of this exercise will be to facilitate prioritization of potential projects and management actions to address water uses and needs in the Animas watershed.

- A sub task of stakeholder engage will be a public engagement aspect (e.g., public outreach, surveys, etc.) to better understand the public value associated with the Animas River.
- AWP will work with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe to incorporate cultural values into the plan and how best address other tribal needs as a part of the process.

TASK 2 – RIVER HEALTH ASSESSMENT. Expand understanding and inventory of identified priorities from Phase 1A and 1B through data analysis, data acquisition where necessary, and evaluation of future conditions’ scenarios.

TASK 3 – PLAN DEVELOPMENT. Identify and prioritize multi-benefit water projects in a Plan that address stakeholder priorities that incorporate and build upon previously completed studies, reports, and analysis as well as ongoing, parallel efforts (e.g. Forest Health, community plans). In development of the Plan, project partners will identify projects that have been previously identified and prioritized by the water community to begin their implementation in parallel with this planning effort.

The following outcomes have been identified for Phase 2:

- Completion of a well-coordinated planning process that informs and incorporates input from stakeholders and the community.
- Understanding of existing and potential future water resource conditions using current data, models, and inventories incorporating the project areas’ hydrology, environmental and recreation (E&R) water needs, agriculture infrastructure, forest health, and climate change scenarios.
- Identification of cooperative, voluntary projects, that have been identified in existing planning documents and reports or developed through this planning effort, to address multiple water needs, including environmental, recreational, agricultural, and municipal;
- Prioritized actions or projects based on stakeholder values and evaluation of benefits (e.g. ecological, economic, recreational, agricultural efficiency), direct or indirect consequences, and feasibility.
- A comprehensive plan that describes the goals, objectives, and results from this process for other organizations or agencies to utilize, reference, and leverage for project implementation.
- Development of educational resources to build community awareness of both the Plan process and outcomes as well as current and future conditions of the Animas River watershed.

TASK 4 – PROJECT IDENTIFICATION. After the Animas River Plan is completed, stakeholders will identify potential activities (actions and/or projects) that meet the objectives of the plan. These projects will be developed, evaluated, and prioritized as they relate to the plan. This will be a stakeholder driven process when it comes to prioritization. Lastly, an implementation plan will be developed.

The Animas River Plan supports multiple values of the Colorado Water Plan (CWP) and Southwest Basins Implementation Plan (BIP). This plan will meet the BIP’s goals of meeting recreational and environmental needs while promoting healthy watersheds. The stakeholder driven process of the plan will ensure collaboration across a diverse set of stakeholders while addressing future challenges in the Animas River basin.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of supporting this grant application. We believe that the development of this plan will continue to engage diverse stakeholders in a collaborative approach to addressing key objectives identified by stakeholders during the first phase of this project. Please do not hesitate to contact me for clarification or if you have any questions about the grant proposal.

Sincerely,



Carrie Padgett, Chair

Animas Watershed Partnership