

MINUTES OF LTWRC LANDOWNERS MEETING-DECEMBER 13, 2014

Gordon Gilstrap – Big Thompson Conservation District Board President

To date the LTWRC has secured \$377,000 in grants for master planning and restoration, and is well positioned to receive over \$1 million in grants from the HUD Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program.

Tetra Tech has now completed the master plan for the Little Thompson watershed.

A great deal of work has already been completed along the river through the coordinated efforts of the coalition committees, landowners, volunteers and donations by agencies.

The LTWRC has provided leadership to other coalitions by demonstrating the success of the “neighborhood captains” approach, and incorporating county representatives into the steering committee.

The work of the coalition has made the Little Thompson River more “visible” to media, elected officials and government agencies.

Kevin McCarty, Dierdre Daly and Julie Stapp are working on the Water Supply Reserve Account grant request through Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (NCWCD) with the goal of having in-stream flow throughout the year on the Little Thompson River.

Joshua Stolz – Colorado State Seedling Nursery Manager

The Colorado State Forest Service Nursery is on The Colorado State University foothills campus in Fort Collins. It is a 130 acre farm with 80 acres for field production and 18,000 square feet of greenhouse space. The nursery provides low-cost, Colorado-grown plant material for all of the State’s diverse growing environments, to be used for conservation applications.

The Big Thompson Conservation District is selling seedling trees from the state nursery. Josh provided samples of the small, large, and tall potted trees. It is no longer necessary to have a minimum 2 acres to purchase through the program.

Recent efforts have been made to increase inventory levels and diversify inventory at the nursery, but they do not wish to compete with commercial nurseries. Most of the trees are native or introduced species that are good for Colorado. The nursery is working on establishing a strong Colorado seed source and offering perennials as a pollinator habitat.

A new product is the tall pot offering 5 different species ideal for riparian restoration. Willows and cottonwoods are fast growing specimens that work well for stream-bank stabilization.

The forest service charges a \$50 fee for a site consultation performed by an expert forester. \$25 of the fee goes toward the purchase of seedling trees. The nursery staff is also available to answer questions over the phone.

Questions:

Josh recommends amending the soil before planting in silt deposits. He may have empty tall pots to loan to property owners to harvest and replant volunteer seedlings.

Peggy Bailey – Tetra Tech Project Manager

In September the draft master plan was completed. From mid-September to mid-November Tetra Tech reviewed written and verbal comments from landowners and county officials. 26 plan sheets have been modified to update 73 site descriptions that include quantities and costs.

A ‘purpose and needs’ section has been added to the plan. This includes an interpretive discussion on the ‘big picture’, including anecdotal information and pictures on pre-flood conditions.

Illustrative drawings have been added to provide graphical representation of improvements to increase understanding of recommendations and to support funding efforts.

In December/January the master plan will be finalized. 15 paper plan sets will be available for viewing as well as an electronic copy on the website.

The master plan still needs detailed hydraulic analysis as seen on some of the other rivers, including floodplain elevations, sediment transport, and geomorphology planform. Recommendations have been made to improve channels, but the 'grand picture' for implementation is still missing, including approximation of costs. Peggy recommends going after a CDBG grant to do further hydrology analysis and assessments, due January 30, 2015.

By mid-July funding should be available for final design for project construction. Approvals and permits will still be required for projects because the master plan is not a regulatory document.

Tetra Tech, Chris Sturm and coalition members will tour parts of the river in January to finalize decisions regarding CWCB grant implementation.

Questions:

How does the 'Waters of the United States' legislation affect the planning and restoration work on the river?

Per Gordon: The National Association of Conservation Districts, and the Department of Agriculture are requesting that EPA back off on the plan. If the legislation passes, ag producers may be the most impacted but some parts of the legislation could impact river restoration. The exact impact isn't clear.

Chris Sturm - Colorado Water Conservation Board Stream Restoration Coordinator

The CWCB is an agency within the State Department of Natural Resources. In November of 2013, the Office of Emergency Management provided \$2 million for master planning of 9 flood-affected watersheds.

There have been three allocations of Community Development Block Grant for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). While these grant funds are managed by the State of Colorado, they must meet federal requirements. Grant projects must be completed within two years of obligation. 80% of the funding must go to Larimer, Boulder and Weld Counties.

Some agriculture producers have been working on receiving grants from the first \$62 million allotment.

The second round of funding (\$199 million) includes the Watershed Resiliency Pilot Program. It provides \$25 million for coalition capacity building, and for implementation of projects identified by watershed master plans. Resiliency is for flood and fire events, it includes the entire watershed.

In the coming months each coalition will be hiring a Watershed Coalition Coordinator and a Watershed Program Assistant who will be funded through the DR grant for 3 years. Coalitions will still be viable after that time through different forms of funding. The Coordinator will be finding grant dollars for the future through private and government organizations. Prior to hiring for these positions, the coalitions must have in place a mission, vision, and organizational structure including identification of a fiscal agent.

Planning is a separate DR funding source. There is a grant request deadline of March 16 for the first phase of implementation. This will be for smaller projects up to \$300,000. These demonstration sites will focus on consistency and prove methodologies recommended by the master plan. These projects will begin during the summer/fall of 2015. The second phase grants will be due in November for \$1-3 million. We must be careful how we tap into the money, timing is important to make sure we

can meet the regulations and get the projects completed in 2 years.

Colorado has not received any guidance for the third round of DR funding for \$58 million.

The Little Thompson and Big Thompson coalitions are considering working together to hire a grant-writer for the DR money.

To review program guidelines for the DR funding visit the website at: dola.Colorado.gov/cdbg-dr. According to FEMA there are many idiosyncrasies in the DOLA HUD grant. Some wording has yet to be changed to address the pilot program.

Other sources of funding can be found through State programs. State money is easier to acquire because of the strict guidelines for environmental reviews and audits that are attached to federal money. However, the state can't change regulatory floodplains. The state may provide flood plain delineation cost through the FEMA grants.

The Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) grant of \$170,000 needs a 1 to 1 match for implementation. Work done up to 6 months prior to grant award counts toward the match. It can also come from leveraging funds from other grant sources, such as the DR funds. Coalition should also work with the counties to leverage money spent on county projects. For this reason, the coalition must be pragmatic about the projects that are selected.

There is also a possibility of more NRCS watershed protection funding.

Questions:

How are the properties selected?

The coalition will prioritize the projects, the Watershed Coordinator will help with facilitation. Tetra tech is an objective third party in decision making for implementation.

How will be Watershed Coordinator be selected?

Because there will be 9 coalitions looking to fill this position, there will be a nationwide search for coordinators. The CWCB will be there every step of the way to assist the coordinator. The coordinator cannot write grants while under DR money. CWCB state money may be available for this purpose.

Can the money be parsed into small amounts?

The DR money is with the coalition, not private property owners. It is up to the coalition to determine how the funds will be allocated.

Aren't we putting the cart before the horse by looking at re-vegetation of the bank?

Indeed, the river channel is still responding to the flood, in some places the river is still changing. However, the planning document will show the width of the river so planting can be done without risk.

Are there strings attached to the DR funding?

Yes, land use strings are attached for landowners, including floodplain compliance and environmental reviews. For now we will use the original FEMA regulatory floodplain delineations. Projects must demonstrate no rise on regulatory floodplain map or go through a Letter of Map Revision to update the map.

Since Colorado does have the post flood hydrology, the CWCB will propose remapping the regulatory floodplain.