



Yampa River Fund

A Transformational Investment for Nature & People

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Surrounded by sagebrush-shrouded hills and dense groves of aspen and pine, the free-flowing Yampa River is central to people's lives and nature in the local community. The Yampa River basin is home to large populations of iconic, native wildlife such as bear, mountain lion, deer, moose, elk, and the greater sage-grouse. Its waters sustain cottonwood forests, native trout, and four endangered and several declining native fish species.

The basin is also home to generations of ranchers, farmers and others who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. For them, the river provides more than just water for their crops and livestock. It is an essential part of their identity and way of life. Additionally, the river is at the heart of a thriving tourism and outdoor recreation industry in the valley. Outdoor

recreation connects people to nature through fishing, boating, skiing, hiking and biking.

The Challenge

As towns, agriculture and industry grow and need more water, the Yampa River has less to give. Impacts from climate change are exacerbating water shortages. Increased drought and hotter air temperatures are reducing already-low river flows. In summer 2018, there was a call on the Yampa for the first time in history. The call required some water users to reduce or stop using water from the river for several months. It's becoming more and more difficult to balance the water we need with the water we have. "Business as usual" is no longer good enough with our changing climate



The recreation and destination travel industries recognize that the longevity and sustainability of their businesses depend on a healthy and thriving natural environment. Increasingly, outdoor recreation consumers expect brands to protect the places and resources on which they depend. To attract customers and build social license to operate, outdoor recreation businesses are aligning themselves with high-profile efforts to “give back” to communities and the natural world.

An Innovative Solution: The Yampa River Fund

Since 2000, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has created 34 successful water funds across the globe. Now, TNC is bringing this powerful solution to Colorado. The Yampa River Fund will improve river flows in Northwest Colorado, ensuring we have the right amount of water at the right time and in the right places to sustain both people and nature.

The Yampa River Fund is a collaborative community-based organization dedicated to identifying and funding activities that protect the water supply, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities provided by the Yampa River. The Fund will invest in conservation and restoration activities that positively impact river flows to support the livelihoods of recreation and tourism businesses as well as ranchers throughout the valley.

Through the Yampa River Fund, TNC is establishing a sustainable source of funding to:

- Enhance water security for communities, agriculture, the economy, and the natural environment in the Yampa Valley;
- Support a healthy, flowing river and enhance critical low flows through water leases from reservoirs, and;
- Maintain or improve river function through a holistic approach to restoration of riparian and/or in-channel habitat.

The Fund is governed by a local Board and Steering Committee. The endowment will be managed by the Yampa Valley Community Foundation and all funding decisions will be made by the 13-member Steering Committee. The day-to-day business of the Fund will be executed by TNC through 2021, but the goal is to leverage the Fund to expand local capacity and transfer the management role to a local entity in 2022. This community-driven funding tool will ensure the Yampa River has the funding it needs to function as a healthy rivers system for all those who rely on it.

Conclusion

The fate of the Yampa River Valley is tied inextricably to the fate of its river. The Yampa River Fund will establish a secure, sustainable funding source and collaborative decision-making structure for conservation projects and programs on the river. The work will enhance and benefit agriculture, communities, environment, and recreation that relies on the Yampa River.