



# COLORADO

## Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

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**To:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission

**From:** Jeromy Huntington  
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**Date:** May 19, 2022

**Re:** Colorado River Connectivity Channel project background and update

### Project Status

*Colorado River Connectivity Channel Project construction staging is ongoing with the official start of construction expected in early June 2022. Initial project costs, currently estimated at \$31.2 million, are expected to be funded. However, ongoing maintenance and adaptive management for the project remain critically short of funds.*

### Windy Gap Reservoir and the Colorado River Connectivity Channel

Windy Gap Reservoir is a shallow, on-channel reservoir owned and operated by Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (Northern Water) that blocks movement of fish and other aquatic organisms in the Colorado River, interrupts the natural sediment supply and degrades downstream aquatic habitat. The health of the river below the reservoir has been in serious decline since the reservoir was built in the mid-1980s, with documented losses of 38% of macroinvertebrate diversity, including the loss of giant stoneflies (a major food source for trout) in some reaches, the complete loss of native Mottled Sculpin, and a decline in trout production in this state-designated Gold Medal trout fishery.

The goal of the Colorado River Connectivity Channel (CRCC) is to establish a natural river channel around Windy Gap Reservoir to reconnect the Colorado River. When completed, the CRCC is expected to remove the barrier to aquatic migration and sediment movement, create new aquatic habitat in the CRCC, improve the river's resiliency in the face of increasing water diversions and climate change, and provide significant economic benefits to the small Grand County communities that rely on revenue generated by recreation. A dam realignment and bypass of this scale has never been completed in Colorado, and to staff's knowledge, may be the first of its kind in the country. The CRCC is a keystone project to restore physical and biological connectivity of the Colorado River around Windy Gap Reservoir.



The CRCC was investigated as a part of Northern Water’s 2011 Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Plan with CPW for the Windy Gap Firming Project, a new transmountain water development project being pursued by Northern Water. The CRCC is considered an enhancement project. The CRCC is *not* mitigation for the Windy Gap Firming Project, nor is its completion required by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ final record of decision approving the Windy Gap Firming Project. The CRCC project is scheduled to start construction in June 2022 and must be completed by September 30, 2023 to meet the NRCS funding requirements discussed below. See Figure 1 for the current CRCC design.

### Funding

The CRCC project partners, including CPW, have provided significant resources for the project; the complete list of CRCC project partners and contributions is listed in Table 1 shown below. In addition, the CRCC project was packaged with the Colorado River Habitat Project and irrigation efficiency projects by the Irrigators of Lands in the Vicinity of Kremmling (ILVK) into the “Colorado River Headwaters Project.” This grouping allowed the partners to obtain approximately \$7.8 million of NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) resources for the Headwaters Project, of which \$5.67 million was designated to the CRCC. See Figure 2 for a diagram of the Headwaters Project components and its relationship with the Colorado River Habitat Project, discussed below.

The Colorado River Habitat Project Phase I - Kemp Breeze Project, which is being implemented by CPW, is intended to be used as a match project for the NRCS RCPP money. CPW has also committed \$575,000 of in-kind resources for oversight of habitat improvement projects in the upper Colorado River and monitoring of the CRCC and ILVK projects. Additionally, CPW has contributed roughly \$200,000 of in-kind resources to conduct a fish movement study along the CRCC.

To date, CPW has not contributed any cash resources toward the CRCC project, however staff have contributed over 12,200 hours toward the Headwaters Project as a whole, including design review of the CRCC. CPW staff continue to discuss design elements with Northern Water and their design team to encourage natural channel design and successful fish passage.

CRCC project costs continue to rise, with project costs now projected at approximately \$31.2 million. The CRCC project partners continue to fundraise for the project; thanks to a recent influx of private dollars and an additional \$8.7 million from NRCS (anticipated), construction is expected to be fully funded. However, the CRCC project partners are developing a maintenance and adaptive management program that is largely unfunded. CPW is anticipating contributing funds towards adaptive management at this point instead of construction.

### Attachments

Table 1. Colorado River Connectivity Channel partners’ cash contributions

Figure 1. Proposed Colorado River Connectivity Channel

Figure 2. Components and relationships of the Headwaters Project and Habitat Project

<b>Table 1. Colorado River Connectivity Channel partners' cash contributions</b>	
<b><u>Watershed Plan EA and Engineering Cost:</u></b>	
<i>Total Construction Cost:</i>	<u>\$3,543,500</u>
<b>Funding Sources</b>	<b>Dollar (\$) Amount</b>
Northern Water	\$1,622,000
CWCB	\$1,021,500
NRCS	\$900,000
<b><u>CRCC Construction Cost Estimate:</u></b>	
Contractor	\$24,100,000
Construction Engineering	\$2,050,000
Contingency	\$1,500,000
<i>Total Construction Cost:</i>	<u>\$27,650,000</u>
<b>Funding Sources</b>	<b>Dollar (\$) Amount</b>
NRCS (pending increase request)	\$8,677,000
CWCB	\$6,000,000
NRCS	\$4,781,600
Northern Water/Subdistrict	\$3,322,500
Trout Unlimited - Corporate Sponsors	\$1,724,300
River District	\$1,025,000
Grand County	\$1,000,000
Trout Unlimited - Upper Colorado River Alliance	\$894,100
Trout Unlimited - GOCO/NFWF	\$225,500

Figure 1. Proposed Colorado River Connectivity Channel

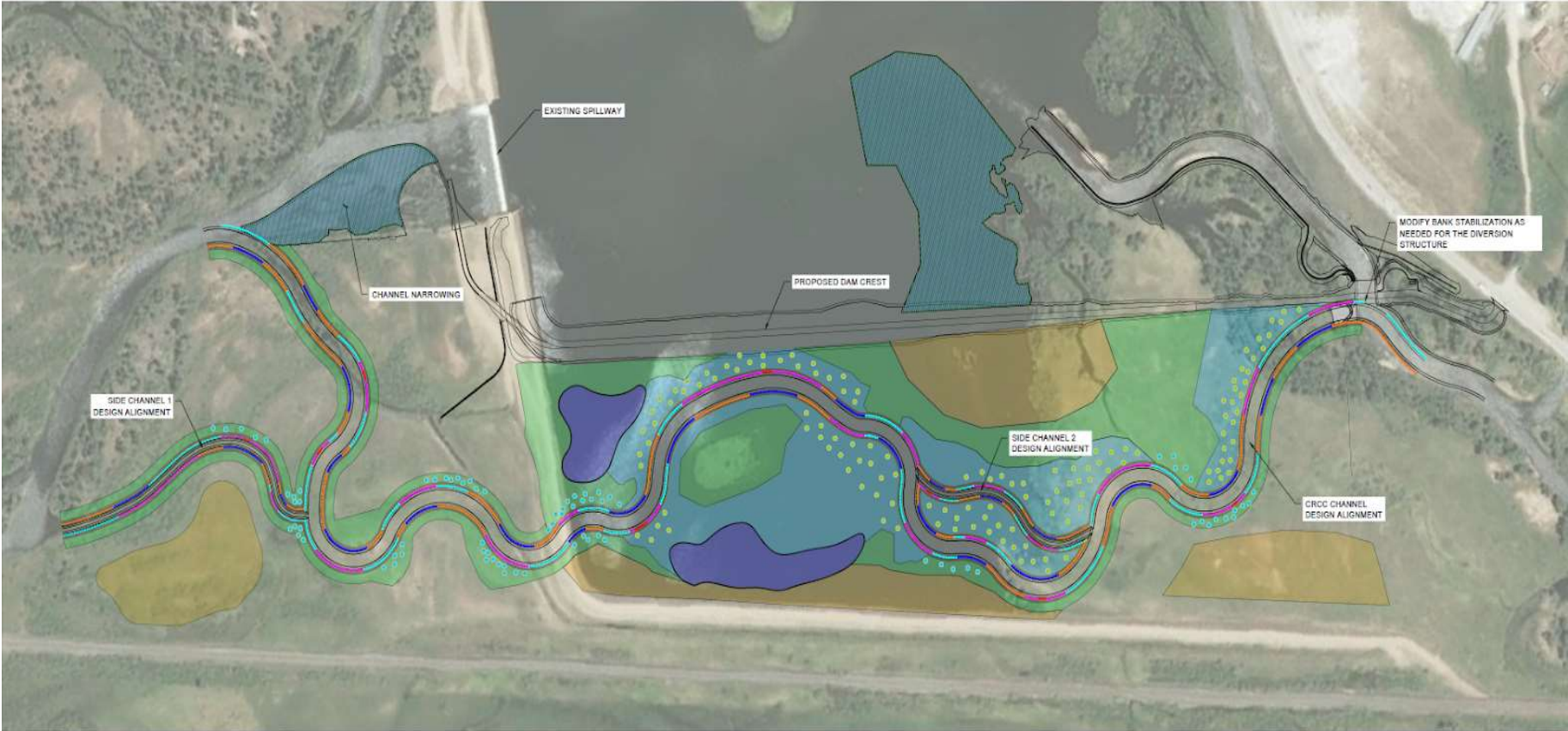


Figure 2. Components and relationships of the Headwaters Project and Habitat Project

