

URBAN FLOWS

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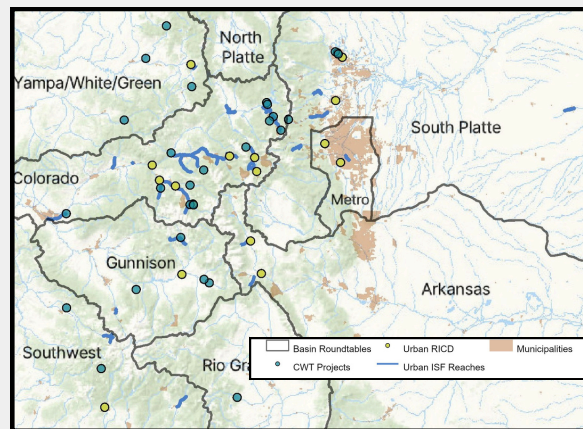


1 PURPOSE

The Colorado Water Trust (CWT) is a nonprofit organization, established in 2001 during historic droughts, which prompted an innovative approach to protecting Colorado's waterways. They use market-based approaches to keep water instream, as opposed to diverting it, to protect ecological values. This approach is known as *streamflow restoration*.

While CWT has worked throughout the State of Colorado, most of their streamflow restoration projects have occurred on the Western Slope in rural areas of the state, more sparsely populated and in partnership with local agricultural water users.

But as Colorado cities continue to grow, CWT seeks to be better positioned to respond to the complexities and multi-user dynamics at play in urban settings. By linking urban streamflow conditions with ecological, recreational, and social priorities, the work helps CWT identify collaborative, regionally relevant opportunities where stream flow protections can deliver shared public benefits.



This map shows the current state of protections of urban flows through Recreational In-Channel Diversions (RICDs) and Instream Flow Rights (ISFs). It shows where past CWT projects are in relation to Colorado's urban areas.

2 METHODS

The MENV Graduate Consultant team devised a plan for by using a model of learning, listening, and participating throughout this year-long project to gain insights into how people interact and use urban waterways to identify convergence and divergence in values.

Learning

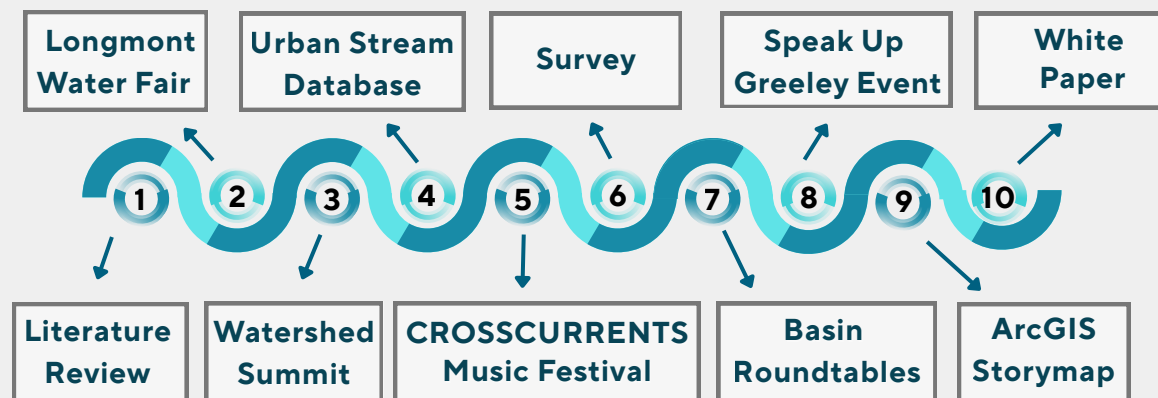
- Literature Review
- Water Conversations

Listening

- Watershed Summit
- Survey

Participating

- Longmont Water Fair
- Basin Roundtables

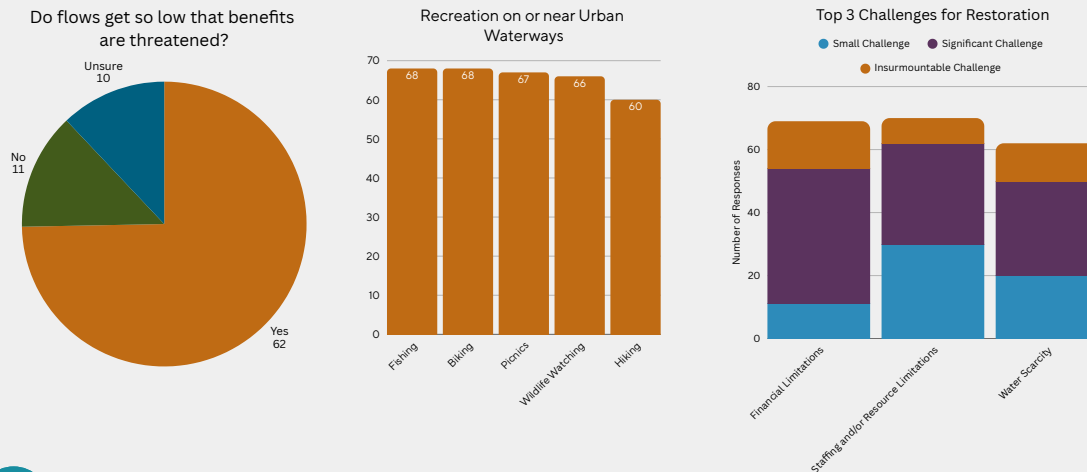


(Project Roadmap)

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3 RESULTS

As Colorado's cities grow and climate pressures intensify, urban streams are increasingly asked to serve multiple roles – supporting ecological health, recreation, and community well-being while operating under constrained flows. Building on Colorado Water Trust's mission to protect and restore streamflows statewide, this project focuses on understanding how urban waterways are used and valued, and where stream flow protections can deliver the greatest public benefit. By combining community engagement, data analysis, and regional context, this work informs more integrated approaches to urban stream management. The statewide survey that follows captures how communities across Colorado experience urban streams and where low-flow conditions are perceived to threaten those benefits most.



4 IMPACT

How this work informs integrated, multi-benefit urban stream management in Colorado.

Impact 1

Urban stream flow data and community values are directly aligned with state water planning priorities.

Supports Colorado's Water Plan

This project supports the Colorado Water Plan's call for integrated, multi-benefit water management by bringing together data, community values, and instream flow needs.

Impact 2

Support better decision-making as climate change increases hydrologic variability in urban streams.

Climate Resilience

These results can strengthen drought-resilience planning by highlighting where stream-flow protections can buffer against declining water quality, habitat loss, and reduced recreational access.

Impact 3

Build shared understanding around the value of instream flows in urban waterways.

Community Buy-in

By centering community priorities such as recreation, ecological health, and quality of life, we help bridge gaps between municipalities, water managers, and local stakeholders.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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