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GC water quality updates

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Grand County Water Quality Specialist Katherine Morris and contract employee Lurline Underbrink-Curran gave a water quality update at the first Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) meeting of 2017.

WINDY GAP BYPASS

On Dec. 21, 2016 the Natural Resources Conservation Service, part of the federal US Department of Agriculture, announced The Colorado River Headwaters Project (CRHP) would receive a \$7.75 million grant to apply to a series of river restoration and conservation projects in Grand County. The grant, totaling \$7,758,830, comes to the CRHP through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), part of the NRCS. The grant equals 80 percent of the requested amount. Underbrink-Curran said, in an update, that there are several sources the RCPP will apply to for the remaining funds. With the amount of money secured, other funders may be more willing to sign on to a project that has the ability to be completed and do such great things for the environment, fish passage, water quality and temperature and agriculture.

The \$7.75 million grant will be divided up between a series of water projects including the creation of a bypass channel that will connect the Colorado River below the Windy Gap Reservoir to the sections of the River above the Reservoir. A significant portion of the funds will also be used to improve river habitat downstream from the Windy Gap as well as improving irrigation systems for irrigating ranchers in the Kremmling area and to improve soil and water quality.

According to Underbrink-Curran, the water right issue for the bypass channel has made some progress. At the last meeting there was a real effort to find a path that all could agree upon. Steve Bushong with UCRA had drafted a position that all agreed might work. That draft was circulated with the attorneys and has undergone several revisions and inclusions but seems to be getting close to complete.

UPRR INJECTION WELL

Morris said in December of 2016 the Water Quality Board requested she submit a letter to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) expressing the board's dissatisfaction of a revised discharge permit for Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR).

UPRR plans to submit a Class V Injection Well permit for a site near the Moffat Tunnel in Winter Park. Class V wells are used to inject non-hazardous fluids underground. Most are used to dispose of waste into or above underground sources of drinking water. This disposal can pose a threat to ground water quality if not managed properly.

According to UPRR, The plant would treat and return 95 percent of the contaminated groundwater issuing from the tunnel and return it, clean, to the Fraser River.

Grand County shared their concerns with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) stating that the plant was designed to treat only metals and total suspended solids (TSS), but the current discharge permit only recognizes TSS and metals as contaminants. According to Morris, Grand County does not know what will be the fate of the organic pollution that will also be in the discharge during annual tunnel cleaning operations, which is what caused the pollution found in September.

Morris said she has not drafted the letter yet because the permit has not been released.

BERTHOUD PASS SEDIMENT CONTROL

Morris said the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is asking for comments by Jan.30 on a draft Berthoud Pass Sediment Control Action Plan (SCAP). The SCAP will identify potential scenarios for enhanced maintenance and sediment control features to be implemented when funding becomes available. The last meeting about this effort took place in October of 2015. Morris said she will be reviewing the SCAP this month.