



PEAKS TO PEOPLE WATER FUND SPRING 2024 NEWSLETTER

Hello from beautiful Northern Colorado!

As spring unfolds its charms, we hope you're basking in the season's beauty as much as we are. However, with summer close on the horizon, we're reminded of the imminent wildfire season, a persistent threat to our ecosystems and way of life. It underscores the vital importance of our collective efforts and your unwavering support.

Since our last update, we've been deeply immersed in initiatives aimed at safeguarding our watersheds and restoring forest health. From enhancing our Watershed Investment Tool to better reflect current landscape conditions, to identifying new avenues for funding critical projects, our commitment remains steadfast. We've lent our expertise to the Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership (BTWHP), aiding in the crafting of impactful mission and vision statements and much more.

In February, we received crucial funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board to create a Wildfire Ready Action Plan for the Big Thompson watershed, a milestone made possible through the generosity of key partners such as Northern Water, Big Thompson Watershed Coalition, and Estes Valley Watershed Coalition. April saw us showcasing the important collaborative work of several BTWHP partner organizations during a field tour at the After the Flames conference in picturesque Estes Park, Colorado.

May brought yet another rewarding retreat with our dedicated team and Board of Directors, where we fine-tuned our strategic blueprint for sustained success. As we step into June, we're thrilled to be part of the team that is presenting the newly created POD's dashboard to the broader NOCO Fireshed Collaborative, a testament to our collective momentum and enthusiasm for the tasks ahead.

We're invigorated by the many opportunities unfolding before us and eager to share our recent endeavors and future plans with you. Keep an eye out for further updates in the months ahead, and join the conversation on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Your continued support fuels our passion and progress—thank you. We wish you a wonderful summer season.

*Warm regards,
The Peaks to People Water Fund Team*



Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership News

We are excited to share with you the newly crafted mission and vision statement for the Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership (BTWHP). We worked closely with BTWHP members over several months to collaboratively develop a mission and vision that accurately reflects our collective commitment to the health and resilience of the watershed and the communities dependent on it.

Our mission is to achieve measurable progress towards long-term health and resilience of our watershed and its valuable assets by leveraging shared resources and taking collaborative action.

Our vision is a resilient Big Thompson watershed that prepares our communities and natural resources for the impacts of climate change, wildfires and post fire flooding.



As the calendar flipped to the new year, members of the Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership (BTWHP) gathered with a shared goal: enhancing our wildfire management strategies through a comprehensive exploration of Community Readiness. Central to our efforts is leveraging the power of community to build readiness and resilience.

Our discussion delved into the social dynamics that form the foundation of community preparedness. What makes a community ready to confront wildfire threats? The answer lies in the strength of our connections—communities bound by shared experiences and a deep sense of place are better equipped to adopt stewardship and proactive measures. Read more in our blog, [Exploring Community Readiness for a Resilient Big Thompson Watershed](#).

Currently the BTWHP is collaborating on two substantial landscape scale projects aimed at reducing wildfire risk to the watershed: the development of a Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) dashboard for the watershed and a Wildfire Ready Action Plan (WRAP) through the Colorado Water Conservation Board. Read on to learn more...



Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership News (cont.)

Peaks to People is working closely with partners from the Colorado State Forest Service, Larimer County Office of Emergency Management, Colorado Forest Restoration Institute and others to develop a new approach to watershed-level strategic planning through the development of a cutting-edge Potential Operational Delineation's (PODs) dashboard. This interactive tool visualizes, tracks, and collaboratively plans actions, aligning individual efforts for landscape-scale impact. The tool is in its early stages. We will continue to build out its functionality for our watershed in collaboration with the many BTWHP and Northern Colorado Fireshed partners involved in its creation. Learn more about the inception of this dashboard in our blog, [Navigating the Future of Wildfire Management: Innovations in the Big Thompson Watershed](#).

In addition to our collaboration on the PODs dashboard, Peaks to People is also the project sponsor for the development of a Wildfire Ready Action Plan (WRAP) being developed for the Big Thompson watershed. This comprehensive plan, part of the Colorado Water Conservation Board's Wildfire Ready Watersheds initiative, will identify strategic pre- and post-wildfire projects to safeguard water resources within the watershed. Over the past 12 months, we have teamed up with the Big Thompson Watershed Coalition (BTWC), Estes Valley Watershed Coalition (EVWC), and the Larimer Conservation District (LCD) as part of the Core Team leading the WRAP effort. In addition to contributing significant time and key data sets, Northern Water, EVWC, and BTWC also provided critical match funding.

After reviewing several excellent proposals, the Core Team hired Matrix Design Group to assist with the development of the WRAP. Matrix has extensive experience with watershed planning, water quality studies, pre-wildfire planning and post-wildfire recovery, ecological function assessments, infrastructure assessments, and asset management. We are working closely with



Matrix and making great progress with the creation of the WRAP. We have been engaged with many stakeholders throughout the data collection process and we are now well into hazard analysis.

Learn more about Colorado's Wildfire Ready Watersheds initiative and the development of our Big Thompson WRAP in our latest blog, [Fire-Ready Future: Crafting a Wildfire Ready Action Plan for the Big Thompson Watershed](#).

As you can see, there's a shared eagerness to improve our collaborative work, both at the watershed and individual project levels.

Peaks to People Water Fund has partnered with a summer intern through CSU's Conservation Leadership program. Her project will be focused on assessing the effectiveness of the collaborative efforts of the Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership and designing a system for collecting ongoing meaningful feedback from the partners involved.

With the strong momentum and enthusiasm behind our partnership, we are optimistic about the future. We have embarked on a historic journey in the Big Thompson Watershed, united in our efforts to create a more resilient landscape.



Cherokee Park Community Forest Health Project Tour

We recently enjoyed a fun day out in the field with our partners from Larimer Conservation District (LCD) and Larimer County Office of Emergency Management in Cherokee Park north of Red Feather Lakes visiting an active project site with more than a dozen local community members. Leading our expedition was Dylan Alsbach, Forestry Program Manager for LCD. The aim of our field tour was twofold: to inform those interested in similar endeavors on their land and to highlight the transformation from pre-treatment to post-treatment, providing a real-time glimpse into the restoration process. “Educating landowners so they understand the science is a huge piece of our work. It looks different than people might expect,” explained Alsbach. Forest restoration is a labor-intensive endeavor, spanning years from inception to fruition. From outreach and education to meticulous planning and execution, every phase demands unwavering commitment and resources. With costs exceeding \$6,000 per acre for projects involving complete biomass removal, securing funding from diverse partners is imperative. It is through collaborative efforts, bolstered by organizations like Peaks to People Water Fund, that initiatives like those in Cherokee Park become feasible.



Learn more about the tour in our blog, [Journey to Restoration: Exploring Cherokee Park’s Renewal](#).



Project Updates

MacGregor Ranch – Peaks to People, in partnership with the Colorado Nature Conservancy (TNC), is providing \$80,000 towards 80 acres of forest restoration being implemented by Larimer Conservation District (LCD) at the historic MacGregor Ranch in Estes Park, Colorado as part of our ongoing Big Thompson Initiative. The proposed treatment area is 1.5 miles to the northeast of downtown Estes Park and adjacent to numerous privately owned parcels of land. The project area drains into the Big Thompson River Watershed and exists extremely close to the Big Thompson River, making this treatment a critical area for water quality impacts in the event of wildfire.

Historic forest type is mostly Ponderosa Pine. Species composition has drastically shifted, tree densities are much higher, and average tree age class is lower than historic reference conditions for the site. Species such as Douglas Fir and Lodgepole



Project Updates cont.

Pine have moved in and caused continuous dense forest canopy that exhibits very little spatial variability. This creates a much higher risk of catastrophic wildfire because the fuels are excessive and continuous, effectively creating the perfect conditions for crown fire activity.

The MacGregor Ranch project area, like many projects in Northern Colorado, requires heavy tree thinning to restore the forest to a healthy composition, structure, and ecologically functioning state.

In addition, this project location is referenced as a priority work area under the newly re-written Estes Park Community Wildfire Protection Plan (2022). The area east of Dry Gulch Road is directly adjacent to the “North Estes Project Area” as it is outlined in the Estes Park CWPP, and reflects a heightened need to address excessive fuel loading in the vicinity around Dry Gulch.

Pole Hill East— We are also providing support for a 65-acre LCD project within the Pole Hill community over two different private properties. This treatment area will build upon over 400 acres of completed forest restoration work LCD has completed to date across 18 different properties in the community. The East Pole Hill project is in a catchment that drains to the Big Thompson River via Cottonwood and Dry Creek. Their position upstream of Pinewood, Flatiron, Carter Lake, and the soon to be Chimney Hollow Reservoirs could mitigate fire spread into the watersheds directly draining to these critical components of the Colorado-Big Thompson system. The downstream values include Barnes Ditch and the Loveland Greeley Canal which are valued by the City of Greeley.

The Pole Hill and Pinewood communities are situated in a densely populated and geographically condensed area, reflecting a massive risk for residents in the event of a wildfire. One ingress and egress route exists to and from the community, showing the necessity for continued forest restoration work in effort to make this community more resilient to wildfire.





After the Flames Conference

In April, we attended an informative two-day conference and workshop in beautiful Estes Park, Colorado. The After the Flames conference, hosted by Coalitions and Collaboratives, Inc., is devoted to post-fire recovery. Attendees represent individuals, organizations, and agencies impacted by wildfire and responding to the post-fire impacts, as well as experts in the arena of post-fire recovery.

We were thrilled to be given the opportunity to host a field tour for 45 conference attendees to showcase the impact of some of the collaborative work occurring in the Big Thompson among BTWHP partners.

Participants had a chance to visit the multi-phase, 400-acre pre-fire forest health project being implemented by Larimer Conservation District at MacGregor Ranch. We discussed various aspects of the project including leveraging funding and resources from multiple partners (including Peaks to People), landowner support, community buy-in and the recently completed CWPP for Estes Park. Additional topics for this field stop included incorporating emergency response and preparedness opportunities into pre-fire projects as well as monitoring and adaptive management as we see post-fire impacts on existing treatments. We also learned about riparian restoration efforts as a pre- and post-fire tool to reduce downstream sedimentation and flooding impacts.

Our partners at Big Thompson Watershed Coalition were able to include a classroom component of the BTWHP tour highlighting the postfire recovery work they and others have been doing in the Big Thompson's Retreat community. Topics included: Aerial Mulching, Reforestation, Low Tech Process Based Restoration, Sediment Catchment Basins, and Roadway Restoration.

Conservation Leadership Program Field Day

We spent a lovely day with our partners from Sylvan Dale Ranch and Big Thompson Watershed Coalition engaging with students from [CSU's Masters of Conservation Leadership program](#). The program's mission is to inspire and train future leaders with hands-on learning experiences that emphasize collaboration and project-based approaches. Our day at the ranch included interactive workshops and discussions about sustainable practices, land management, and community engagement. We were inspired by the students' passion and dedication to making a positive impact on the world.





Don't Miss a Drop of Good News

Like and Follow us on Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/peakstopeople/>

We're LinkedIn. Connect with us!

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/peakstopeople/>

Find us on Instagram too.

<https://www.instagram.com/peakstopeoplewaterfund/>



**Peaks to People
Water Fund**

info@peakstopeople.org

970 829 0020

peakstopeople.org

