

# WATERSHED CONNECTIONS SUMMER 2026

## PEAKS TO PEOPLE WATER FUND

*Dear Friends,*

*Can you believe we're already halfway through 2026?*

*Summer has arrived, and while the season seems to fly by, it's also a chance to reflect on the incredible progress we've made together.*

*At Peaks to People Water Fund, the first half of 2026 has been defined by one core theme: turning collaboration and science into measurable watershed protection.*

*From advancing new decision-support tools to strengthening cross-watershed partnerships, everything we do is grounded in a simple goal—protecting the forests and waters that sustain Northern Colorado.*

*We are pleased to welcome Karen Schlatter to our Board of Directors. Karen serves as Director of the Colorado Water Center at Colorado State University, where she works across CSU faculty, Extension, students, and the broader water community to advance collaborative research and education for sustainable water management. Her leadership and expertise will be a tremendous asset to our work.*

*We hope you'll enjoy the stories and updates in this newsletter that highlight the people, partnerships, and projects helping create a more resilient water future. Thank you for being part of this important work.*

*— From all of us at Peaks to People Water Fund*





## Advancing Science for Smarter Watershed Investments

### Watershed Investment Tool 3.0- Smarter Decisions for a More Resilient Water Future

Protecting Northern Colorado's water begins upstream—with knowing where action will make the greatest difference.

That's why we launched the **Watershed Investment Tool (WIT) 3.0**, our most advanced, science-based model for identifying where forest restoration can reduce wildfire risk and protect critical water supplies.

By integrating updated wildfire science, improved forest data, and locally calibrated modeling, WIT 3.0 is helping us make smarter, more strategic investments for healthier forests and more resilient watersheds.

🔗 [Read more](#) about how WIT 3.0 is shaping the future of watershed protection in Northern Colorado.



### Protecting Water Across the Continental Divide

Much of the water that supplies Northern Colorado begins west of the Continental Divide, making healthy headwaters essential to reliable water for our communities.

Peaks to People is partnering with **Northern Water** and the **Colorado Forest Restoration Institute** to expand our Watershed Investment Tool into the Colorado River headwaters. This expansion will help Northern Water identify where forest restoration can best reduce wildfire risk, protect critical water infrastructure, and maximize the return on watershed investments across their entire system.

This work strengthens a shared truth: what happens in the headwaters does not stay in the headwaters.

🔗 [Explore](#) how this cross-basin collaboration is reshaping watershed investment decisions.





## Collaboration in Action: MacGregor Ranch

What does it take to protect Northern Colorado's forests and water from growing wildfire risk? It starts with collaboration.

This spring, Peaks to People Water Fund joined partners at MacGregor Ranch to showcase how landowners, conservation organizations, fire districts, and public agencies are working together to restore forests, strengthen watersheds, and build wildfire resilience across the Big Thompson watershed.

The MacGregor Ranch project is a powerful example of what becomes possible when partners align around shared priorities and coordinated

action. Led by Larimer Conservation District, the 400-acre, multi-phase pre-fire forest and riverscapes health project demonstrates how cross-boundary collaboration, shared investment, and strong community relationships can move complex restoration work from planning to implementation.

Discover why this project is a model for landscape-scale conservation—and how partnerships are turning shared priorities into lasting impact.

👉 [Read the full story](#) on this model for landscape-scale conservation.





## Recognition for Collective Impact

### 2026 Larimer County Environmental Stewardship Award

We are honored to have received the 2026 Larimer County Environmental Stewardship Award, recognizing our collaborative work to protect Northern Colorado's forests, watersheds, and water supplies. This work is not the result of one organization—it is the result of many working together toward a shared future.

*"This award does not belong to Peaks to People alone; it belongs to the remarkable coalition of municipalities, businesses, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community members who step up every day to support our watersheds. It belongs to the more than 15 dedicated organizations within the Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership who cross jurisdictional lines to protect our shared home." Julie Dubin, Executive Director, Peaks to People Water Fund*



🔗 [Read the full story](#) to learn why this award represents much more than a milestone—it reflects the power of partnership to protect the water we all depend on.



2026 Larimer County Environmental Stewardship Award recipients : **Jeff Puckett, City of Fort Collins – Shift Your Ride Program, Red Feather Lakes Wildfire Defense Project, and Peaks to People Water Fund.**

*"For 31 years, this tradition really reflects our community's resiliency, the way that we face environmental challenges, and that we work together to face them," said Larimer County Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally. Since its inception, the number of awards given out now totals 112. "These awards are really a big deal, and recognize excellence in dedication, innovation, leadership, education, and sustainability. These recipients all embrace all of those values."*



## Get to Know our New Board Member: Karen Schlatter

Peaks to People Water Fund is pleased to welcome **Karen Schlatter** to our Board of Directors.

She currently serves as **Director of the Colorado Water Center at Colorado State University**, where she works to engage Colorado's water community—including CSU faculty, Extension, and students—in co-developing research and education programs that support sustainable water management. Previously, she facilitated interdisciplinary water research at the University of Florida Water Institute and served as Associate Director of the Colorado River Delta Program at the Sonoran Institute, where she helped lead cross-sector, binational collaboration to support Colorado River restoration efforts.

Karen's leadership in water research, education, and cross-sector collaboration will strengthen Peaks to People's ability to advance watershed protection across Northern Colorado.

To help introduce Karen to our community, we asked her a few questions about her perspective on water, collaboration, and Colorado's future.

### What drew you to Peaks to People Water Fund, and why does our mission resonate with you personally or professionally?

"There are a few things that immediately resonated with me about P2P, the first being their recognition of the critical linkages between healthy watersheds and healthy communities. Water connects people who may not otherwise be part of the same conversation—farmers, municipalities, conservation organizations, businesses, recreationalists, and residents. P2P brings these groups together and drives collaboration around shared goals of restoring and protecting watersheds, which we all depend on. That aligns closely with the work we do at the Colorado Water Center to convene diverse interests, facilitate dialogue, and help stakeholders work through complex water challenges. I also appreciate that P2P takes a long-term, proactive approach. Investing in watershed health before crises occurs is not only critical for Colorado's future, but also an efficient use of increasingly limited resources."

### Why is collaboration so essential in water and watershed work?

"Water can be a contentious space, especially in the Western US, and the challenges don't fit neatly within organizational or geographic boundaries. Meaningful progress requires bringing together different perspectives, expertise, and resources. The most durable solutions I've seen come from people taking the time to build relationships, listen, and work toward shared goals."

### Where would you take people to better understand Colorado's water story?

"I would take them to the headwaters of the Poudre River. It's a place where you can see the connection between forests, fire, snowpack, streams, wildlife, recreation, and communities in one landscape. Being at the headwaters of any Colorado river or stream helps people understand that there's a whole lot that happens in a watershed before water reaches a reservoir, treatment plant, field, or faucet. It all starts with healthy watersheds and the natural processes that capture, store, and release water—what happens upstream affects everyone downstream. Colorado is a headwaters state, and in addition to providing critical water supplies for millions of people, headwaters are places of unique beauty that forms a key part of Colorado's identity."





## Wildfire Awareness Month Connecting With Our Communities

May was a meaningful month for wildfire awareness, education, and community connection across the Big Thompson watershed. Peaks to People Water Fund was grateful to take part in several events that brought residents, partners, fire professionals, land managers, and community leaders together to discuss what it means to live with wildfire in Northern Colorado.

We connected with community members at Loveland Fire Rescue Authority's Community Wildfire Education Day, where families explored practical wildfire prevention and preparedness strategies alongside local agencies. We also joined the Estes Valley Watershed Coalition's event, *Living With Fire: The Past, Present, & Future of Fire in Colorado*, which offered valuable perspectives on fire history, forest ecology, fuels management, and the ongoing work required to build more resilient communities and landscapes.

We enjoyed a cold brew and an informative Fire Lab with our very own Julie Dubin alongside Max Erickson, Colorado State Forest Service Supervisory Forester. They shared information

about the innovative [POD's Dashboard](#). Born from the Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership, this valuable tool helps partners to plan projects under a shared vision at scale.

A highlight of the month was co-hosting the **Fire Lives Here** screening and panel discussion with the National Forest Foundation, Big Thompson Watershed Coalition, and Northern Colorado Fireshed Collaborative. The film sparked thoughtful conversation about the essential role fire plays in shaping Colorado's forests, and the year-round efforts needed to reduce risk, protect communities, and restore healthier landscapes.

Across all of these gatherings, one message came through clearly: wildfire resilience depends on shared responsibility. These events created meaningful opportunities to listen, learn, and connect with people who care deeply about protecting our forests, water supplies, wildlife habitat, and beloved places. We are grateful to everyone who attended, asked questions, shared experiences, and continues to engage in this important work.



TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2026

### Collaborative Spatial Tools The PODs Dashboard

Planning wildfire mitigation across a large landscape involves many stakeholders, a variety of activities, and scales which makes coordinated implementation challenging. Combining the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, the Potential Operational Delineations framework, and a local place-based collaborative process we developed a dashboard to visualize, quantify, and characterize wildfire mitigation opportunities to assist land managers, communities, and anyone implementing wildfire mitigation projects. How does an individual defensible space treatment relate to a thousand-acre prescribed fire treatment? Where is there opportunity for landscape scale and cross-boundary treatments? What is the end goal for a given landscape and how many resources will it take to get there? What was the collaborative process to develop this tool, why is that so important, and what successes have come from it? And finally, what's next? In this talk we'll give an overview of the tool and answer some of these questions.

#### Featured speakers



**Julie Dubin**  
Executive Director  
Peaks to People Water Fund

Julie Dubin leads collaborative, data-driven strategies to enhance wildfire resilience and watershed health in Northern Colorado. With over 20 years of nonprofit leadership experience, Julie specializes in convening diverse stakeholders to achieve landscape-scale restoration. As a facilitator for the Big Thompson Watershed Health Partnership, she coordinates more than 15 public and private agencies to prioritize and implement critical forest health projects.



**Max Erickson**  
Supervisory Forester  
Colorado State Forest Service

Max Erickson is the Supervisory Forester for the Fort Collins Field Office of the Colorado State Forest Service where he leads wildfire mitigation and collaborative forest management strategies.





## Thank You

None of this work happens alone.

It takes partners willing to collaborate across boundaries, communities committed to long-term stewardship, and supporters like you who believe in proactive solutions for Colorado's water future. Thank you for being part of this effort.

## Don't Miss a Drop



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