

# Press Release

For immediate Release

# Comunicado de Prensa

Para publicación inmediata



*[Información en español a continuación]*

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**Town of Carbondale-**

**Crystal River Restoration and Weaver Ditch Efficiency project gets underway.**

The Town of Carbondale and project partner Roaring Fork Conservancy are planning to restore and enhance a one-half mile, 18-acre reach of the Crystal River as it flows through the Town of Carbondale. The project includes improvements to the efficiency of the Town owned Weaver Ditch headgate and diversion, enhancement of the Crystal River in the project reach, and upgrades to Town owned Riverfront Park. The project reach lies between the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Fish Hatchery and the Crystal Bridge Drive's South Bridge. The land is owned by the Town of Carbondale and located within the River Valley Ranch subdivision. Aspen Valley Land Trust, American Rivers, and Colorado Parks & Wildlife were also involved in various stages of the planning process.

**Project Purpose, Background, and Goals**

In 2016, a stakeholder-led planning process identified and prioritized the implementation of the Crystal River Restoration Project to address this severely degraded reach of the lower Crystal River. A collaborative team of experts and local stakeholders has worked hand-in-hand with the Town of Carbondale to develop restoration plans to address the habitat, hydrologic, agricultural, and cultural pressures along this section of the Crystal.

The Project will have measurable habitat benefits to the local reach and is intended to serve as a model for other projects in the Crystal Valley, Roaring Fork Watershed, and state of Colorado by demonstrating how a completed Stream Management Plan can be implemented and translate to significant environmental benefits. Anticipated outcomes include: restoring wetland and riparian areas, preserving healthy habitat for wildlife, enhancing hydrologic connectivity and fisheries, preventing unnecessary dewatering, and providing wildlife-associated education and recreation opportunities for future generations.

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The Project is a result of over 15 years of study and planning. Early in the planning process, four primary goals were established.

- 1) Restore the ecological integrity of the riparian zone through streambank improvements, reconnection of the floodplain, and replacement of invasive weed species and aggressive non-native pasture grasses with healthy and diverse riparian plants, while preserving healthy bird and wildlife habitat.
- 2) Develop a long term, self-sustaining solution to improve river channel stability, fish habitat and spawning areas by promoting conditions that support and enhance instream biotic structure and diversity.
- 3) Create a self-sustaining diversion and head gate structure for the Weaver Ditch to function as part of the river system while maintaining water delivery for the Town of Carbondale in a manner which is compatible with future ditch improvements and efficiencies.
- 4) Enhance passive user experiences of Riverfront Park through interpretive signs, trails, gathering spaces, and educational programs.

## Project Team, Consultants and Funding Partners

The project Management Team consists of the Town of Carbondale Public Works Director Kevin Schorzman and Parks & Recreation Director, Eric Brendlinger. The Town of Carbondale enlisted the services of Heather Lewin, Director of Science and Policy with Roaring Fork Conservancy for grant management and as a planning partner.

Consultants hired for the project include Quinn Donnelly and Alex Heller with Carbondale-based RiverRestoration, and Stephen Ellsperman and Alena Gagnon with Carbondale-based DHM Design. The construction of the project, including the river and upland restoration work will be performed Dave Meyer and his company Redoubt Restoration.

Project funding partners include Pitkin County Healthy Rivers Board and Aspen Valley Land Trust. Planning and implementation grants were received from Aspen Valley Land Trust R3 Fund, Pitkin County Healthy Rivers, Colorado Parks & Wildlife Fishing is Fun Grant program, Colorado Water Conservation Board Water Plan Grants, US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) Water SMART grant, Colorado River District, Great Outdoor Colorado Resilient Communities Fund.

Matching funds for grants were provided by the Town of Carbondale Public Works Water Fund and the Parks & Recreation general fund.

## Construction Schedule

The project has been through the full regulatory review process and has received permits from the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Town of Carbondale. Triggered by federal funding through the USBR WaterSMART grant, the project has also gone through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and received a categorical exclusion. Initially the project construction was proposed for a fall and early wintertime period. In the

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fall of 2021 however, Colorado Parks and Wildlife became more concerned about mountain whitefish in the Crystal River, whose populations are rapidly declining. As a result, the available in-water work window was shifted to a summertime period with a mandate to be complete with in-channel work by September 30. With this new schedule and with respect to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), the project team needed to conduct site visits with the regulatory agencies on this project, (US Fish and Wildlife & Colorado Parks & Wildlife) for a review of the construction timing to mitigate any potential nesting migratory bird disturbance during the upland work. After receiving a letter of recommendations on the timing of the work on the site from the US Fish and Wildlife Biologist from the Colorado Ecological Services Field Office, the project team worked to adjust the construction schedule to meet the compressed construction timeline and to avoid impacts to bird and animal species in Riverfront Park.

In stream and bank work will be conducted after July 15<sup>th</sup> and be completed from the river. Planned restoration and vegetation clearing in the areas of the river access ramp, outdoor classroom space, and trail/boardwalk will be conducted after July 30<sup>th</sup> to limit impacts to nesting migratory birds. In line with the schedule adjustment, the project team and Redoubt Restoration are conducting an onsite meeting with representatives of the Roaring Fork Audubon Chapter prior to the upland work commencing to discuss methods to minimize disturbances to migratory bird habitat during construction.

For more information on the project with further technical information and details a project update white paper is available along with the preferred alternative informative map on the Town of Carbondale Website at this link under the Crystal River Restoration title:

[https://www.carbondalegov.org/i\\_want\\_to/learn\\_about/master\\_plans.php](https://www.carbondalegov.org/i_want_to/learn_about/master_plans.php)