

THE ROARING FORK/COLORADO WATERSHED COLLABORATIVE

HISTORY AND MISSION STATEMENT

10/18/05 – Randy Russell

OVERVIEW

Many of us who are planners and managers recognize that healthy places assume and retain their health, in part, because they've established multiple ways of sharing information, tapping resources, and assuming responsibility for problem solving outside of normal institutional boundaries.

Many of us belong to institutions or entities that have jurisdictional boundaries that restrict our areas of responsibility geographically. Others of us belong to institutions or organizations that restrict our thinking and interactivity by discipline, or profession.

This often results in a 'vertical hierarchy' of interaction. Land managers report upwards to elected officials or regional offices. Educators report to principals and school boards and college presidents. Consultants are driven and constrained by client wishes. Everyone leaves town to get energized in professional workshops and associations, mostly with peers. Rewards for work efforts come from peer associations (mostly outside of a geographical place), or for specific tasks within a geographical place.

What's often missing, is the opportunity to link 'horizontally,' across jurisdictional and agency and professional boundaries. Typically, there is little reward, and scant few opportunities housed in job descriptions, to 'cross fertilize' in work on research, analysis and problem solving at watershed or bio-region levels. Also, typically, jurisdictional boundaries have been drawn historically with little respect for hydrological, economic, social or cultural catchment basins.

HISTORY

Noting the success of various small-region cooperative efforts in the recent past across the nation, local planning staff and Healthy Mountain Communities, a regional non-profit 501 c 3 community organization, instituted a 'Planners and Managers Roundtable,' brown bag lunch session in 2001 that met 3 to 4 times a year to ensure that staff within the watershed area had an opportunity to get to know each other, share resources, surface problems and issues and build connectivity between local, county,

state and federal level staffs. A newsletter and mailing list was developed comprised at first of 50 or so contacts. An early goal of the group was to create a yearly event where knowledge and efforts about larger planning issues and concerns could be shared with the larger community.

Soon after the start-up of this effort, 8 staff and elected officials from Eagle and Garfield Counties, the City of Glenwood Springs, the White River National Forest, the Roaring Fork Conservancy and Healthy Mountain Communities were selected to attend a 3 day workshop on "Gateway" issues hosted by the National Association of Counties and facilitated by the Sonoran Institute. Participants attending that workshop were granted \$5000 each as groups to return home and work to achieving local area goals that they had developed there.

While not a large amount of funds, the \$5000 represented a collective responsibility to expend wisely. Participants in the workshop sensed that the developing core group should be expanded to Pitkin County and to other willing participants. The Roaring Fork/Colorado Watershed Collaborative was born as an ad hoc, and self-selecting larger committee, with invitations sent to all of the previous Planners and Managers Roundtable participants to join and discuss how best to expend the funds and what future direction the group should take.

PRELIMINARY ACTION PLAN

The “new” regional team expanded their initial thinking into a preliminary action plan to promote greater regional cooperation and integrated planning in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River Valleys. The action plan efforts included several interrelated components

Component	Current Status
<p>Examining zoning structures This Step focuses on ensuring that clustering and incentives for sensitive place preservation are present in current regulations. (See http://www.plannersweb.com/articles/are015.html to get an overview on open space /cluster zoning.)</p>	<p>Open space/cluster zoning option adopted by Garfield County, 2003.</p>
<p>Examining referral and support structures. This step focuses on support for traditional rural lands uses and incentives/disincentives for that continued use.</p>	
<p>Compiling regional social economic data analysis. The Sonoran Institute is providing software (it is public domain software developed by the BLM) to generate specific profiles of the economic trends in Eagle, Garfield and Pitkin Counties.</p>	<p>See www.hmccolorado.org/epsinfo.htm for examples. See also State of the Valley Symposium www.hmccolorado.org/sov/2005/sov2005.htm</p>

<p>Developing a regional build out scenario. The first phase of this work effort is complete, with the report on revisions to county level population projections. Garfield County has completed parcel mapping. Sub-area allocations will be largely completed in 2006.</p>	
<p>Conducting a Cost of Community Services Study. COCS studies are a snapshot in time of costs vs. revenues for each land use. These types of studies can explain some of the costs associated with growth from a public expenditure / tax perspective. (See http://farmlandinfo.org/fic/tas/tafs-cocs.html for more information.)</p>	<p>See Costs of Growth Workshop (Dec. 2002) www.hmccolorado.org/workshops/costsofgrowthinfo.htm</p>
<p>Creating a Fiscal and Value Analysis of Alternative Growth Scenarios. The data and analysis from the previous steps will be collected in such a way that it used by the CommunityViz software. We can then use CommunityViz to generate alternative growth scenarios. (See www.envisionutah.org and www.econw.com/wvaf/index.html for examples of alternative growth scenario analysis and www.communityviz.com for case study examples.)</p>	<p>View the CommunityViz fly through of Four Mile Canyon (7mb)</p>

(Please note that to the extent that we can share assumptions on a watershed basis, the above analysis should be helpful to all agencies and entities that might not be able to undertake such analysis by themselves, or, may want to modify assumptions and results within a common regional framework.)

RESULTS TO DATE

Costs of Growth Workshop

This workshop explored the issues of jurisdictional cash flow and balancing the books in light of rapid and continuing growth pressures.

"Calculating the Costs of Growth" turned out to be a topic that resonated with a wide variety of elected officials, managers, planners and other interested parties in our watershed, and an attendance of about 120 at the half day workshop on the 6th of November was evidence of that.

Presenters from the Sonoran Institute, Rural Planning Institute from Durango, and Clarion Associates in Denver walked participants through growth issues in budget formulation and fees and exactions that must now meet state statute requirements. Presenters from the Forest Service, BLM, DOW, the Roaring Fork Conservancy, CDOT and Local Government rounded-out the morning in reminding us all that "Growth leaves a footprint on all of us," with an emphasis on collaborative planning being one important solution to growth issues.

Presentation slides, presenter bios, workshop attendees, workshop evaluations, and many of the materials presented are captured on our web site for your review (www.hmccolorado.org/costsofgrowth/costsofgrowthinfo.htm)

The Watershed Collaborative put this effort together as a team, and it is a prime example of how we can work together to bring in educational, informative and cutting edge current information to our region. We were frankly overwhelmed by the response to a workshop we thought might attract only 40-50 attendees. Everyone hustled to make that work, it was a great team effort, and we can provide this kind of service to ourselves and our constituents on demand in the future.

State of the Valley Symposium

One result of the Collaborative's efforts has been three very successful State of the Valley Symposiums held to date (averaging 120 paid participants and filling the Hotel Colorado facility). The Watershed Collaborative felt that a structured organization that could receive tax free donations should take on the task of organizing that event each year. It would establish a day where the watershed communities could come together and hear from the experts, get stimulated by futurists and examples from other places, learn about the initiatives working in our area, track indicators about land and community health, get briefed on policy implications and political processes at work, and learn from a larger set of national peer groups engaged in similar activities. Healthy Mountain Communities was approached to take on the risk of sponsoring this event, with initial seed money from the Sonoran Institute's common funding pot, as well as some small seed money from the White River Forest, with the goal being to make that yearly event self-sustaining.

The Watershed Collaborative also felt that, very often, planners and managers operate in their own vacuums and fail to reach out to the rest of the community to engage them in the broader and longer range issues confronting a region. It was felt that health care, affordable housing, human services provision, economic vitality and cultural enhancement are equally important indicators of regional vitality as are transportation planning, land use planning, recreation planning, water quality and quantity issues and extractive industry impacts.

As a result, the Planner's and Manager's Newsletter transitioned into the "State of the Valleys" Newsletter – with a deliberate effort to engage all the dynamic sectors in the watershed and provide an interlinking point of connectivity that would extend beyond the yearly Symposium. That mailing list has now grown to 990 recipients, and includes elected and appointed officials, chambers of commerce, realtors, developers, bankers, environmental activists and assorted key respondents from all walks of life.

Water Committee

Under the leadership of the Roaring Fork Conservancy, Pitkin County, and USFS, an ongoing and very productive set of "Water Issues" has brought together key respondents, agencies, conservation groups and others in an ongoing dialog and assembly of related work efforts to look at water quality and water quality issues in the region. This exciting linkage of related water studies and interested agencies continues to explore the complex arena of data base development, knowledge and information dissemination, and policy related studies that impact our communities and future. Collectively they have ensured that their efforts compliment each other, avoid duplication, allow individual efforts to test the applicability and utility of findings, and pool resources to become competitive for major continuing study funding.

Growth Scenarios Taskforce

Other Watershed Collaborative successes have included the recently completed "Growth Scenarios Taskforce" work with the Demography Office and the State of Colorado Department of Local Affairs to update and upgrade county level future population projections. The interim spreadsheets are on line at www.hmccolorado.org and a final report is due out shortly. This effort, staffed entirely by Collaborative staff volunteers and at no cost, with generous support from the State Demographer's Office, lays the groundwork for future planning and sub-area allocation implications and modeling efforts.

WHAT THE WATERSHED COLLABORATIVE ISN'T

At several points over the past several years in the evolution of this self-defined and *ad hoc* network we've taken our pulse and asked the question: "Should the Roaring Fork/Colorado Watershed Collaborative institutionalize?" To date, for several reasons, the answer has been "No." The arguments against institutionalizing are that all of the areas within the watershed are now covered with a multiplicity of institutions, ranging from Councils of Government (requiring formal dues and participation by elected officials), River Districts (also with formal membership requirements), multiple Conservancies, an overwhelming number of non-profits on a per capita basis, environmental groups, interest groups etc. – and all of them competing for dues, time, board participation and attention. And, all of them having their own baggage...

None of those organizations need a new competitor for dues, time, participation or media coverage. And, our elected officials are already stretched thin trying to serve on boards, be liaisons, and otherwise stay current with developments.

Institutions, by their nature, try to be self-sustaining and limit themselves to a membership that has to commit over time, mostly to maintenance tasks. And, because they tend to carve out turf, they tend to be exclusionary in defining themselves.

OK, SO WHAT IS THE WATERSHED COLLABORATIVE?

The Watershed Collaborative is ideally a network of professionals that see the value of horizontal linkages outside their institution, agency or entity as being key to the health of a region. They are a loose knit key contact list that self selects to get together where and when necessary to focus on a problem or opportunity. They define themselves when they assist with shaping and developing the yearly Symposium and helping out with that. They define themselves when undertaking a Growth Scenarios or Water Issues project. They define themselves when they call for help, or provide an opportunity for shared investment. They assemble and reassemble as necessary, and drop out when they have other fish to fry. They 'get' that the State of the Valleys Newsletter is a means of connectivity, and contribute to it, and that work products can be shared and housed on the Healthy Mountain Communities web site which is essentially a-political and a neutral ground for regional efforts.

NEXT STEPS IN WATERSHED COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Work now needs to be done to work over what is now a mailing list of 1000 to enable sorting by interest groups, with the corp group of ad hoc Collaborative members updated and refined. With all of the previously identified work efforts complete or nearing completion, that core group should host itself in an open session to discuss what the next work agenda might be. We will also re-examine the issue of formality and structure in how we work with one another. That's presently anticipated in early 2006.

Anyone interested in being on this core group of contacts should get in touch with:

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