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CITY OF ASPEN PLAN WILL BOOST FLOWS IN ROARING FORK

Aspen will reduce Roaring Fork water use, curtail diversions to benefit community river

For decades, large water diversions have reduced the amount of water flowing in the upper Roaring Fork River; only a fraction of the native flow reaches the City of Aspen. At times, more than ninety percent of the native flow of the Roaring Fork is diverted from the river for transmountain delivery to the Front Range and many local water diversions serving various beneficial uses. To begin exploring long-term streamflow solutions for the Roaring Fork, the City of Aspen is leading local efforts this year by using one of its senior water rights to benefit flows through a critical reach of the Roaring Fork River. On Monday, the Aspen City Council

authorized a nondiversion agreement with the Colorado Water Trust to bypass some water that Aspen would otherwise divert from this reach of the Roaring Fork.

The agreement was the result of an effort last March when Aspen water officials analyzed the City's water rights with the help of the Colorado Water Trust, a nonprofit organization with expertise in restoring and protecting streamflows. Aspen saw that it could increase flows through the City by adjusting the amount of water it takes from the Roaring Fork River at the Wheeler Ditch, one the three most senior water rights in a critical 2.5 mile reach of the Roaring Fork from just above Aspen to Castle Creek. Aspen determined that it can reduce its Wheeler Ditch diversions when the river falls below the 32 cfs instream flow. This could add as much as 8 cfs to the river. This water will help maintain parts of the Colorado Water Conservation Board's six mile long instream flow water right which extends from Difficult Creek to Maroon Creek.

Aspen has a longstanding commitment to streamflow protection, as well as to providing both treated and untreated water for a wide range of municipal uses. In the summer, amenities such as Aspen's parks, mall fountain, and ditch system contribute greatly to the beauty and tranquility of Aspen's mountain community. To accommodate this project, Aspen will lease less water to third parties than it has in the past, reduce outdoor water use, and redirect other water supplies to meet the City's critical needs. City Council agreed to pursue these actions and enter into a nondiversion agreement with the Colorado Water Trust, who will help monitor flows in the reach and help oversee the project. The nondiversion agreement specifies how Aspen will adjust the amount of water it takes from the Roaring Fork at the Wheeler Ditch.

"The City has long considered ways to add flow to the river, but was not finding a way to make an appreciable difference. Our [Roaring Fork] water rights are small in comparison to the amount of water that would flow through the stream under natural conditions," said Dave Hornbacher, Aspen's Director of Utilities and Environmental Initiatives. "After seeing the river suffer a hard year in 2012, a brainstorming group was formed in March to review the City's water rights and to explore options for using those rights to benefit the Roaring Fork."

"Leaving some of the City's water in the Roaring Fork through this short-term nondiversion agreement will allow us to understand the benefits additional water can provide to the natural habitat," added Hornbacher. "We see this project as a first step in crafting a broader, long-term solution for rewatering the Roaring Fork, an effort that will require the help of our entire community. This agreement allows Aspen to meet its water needs while providing as much water as possible to our river this year."

Last year, during severe drought conditions, reaches of the Roaring Fork were nearly dry in parts of June, July, August, and October. While the outlook for this year is not as dire, Aspen is interested in temporarily changing its operations to improve flows through town and benefit the environment in the short-term as Aspen continues to look for long-term strategies to bolster the

Roaring Fork River. Because of Aspen's innovative thinking, commitment to the community, and leadership in improving streamflows, the river will be better off in 2013.

"Aspen was enthusiastic about weighing the options and pursuing the best strategy for putting its water rights in the Roaring Fork to benefit the river this year," says Amy Beatie, executive director of the Colorado Water Trust. "Thanks to its pioneering attitude and incredible leadership, this agreement gives Aspen a mechanism for adding water to their river with both flexibility and accountability. It is inspiring to see a decade of discussions put into action, and we're eager to see how this agreement benefits flows in the stream."

By entering into a nondiversion agreement with the Colorado Water Trust, Aspen will be partnering with an organization that has a proven track record conducting water transactions for environmental and streamflow benefits in voluntary partnerships. Aspen hopes the anticipated benefit to the Roaring Fork from its nondiversion agreement with the Colorado Water Trust will help the City further its stream protection goals while still maintaining the summertime ambiance that makes Aspen such a great place to be.

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The Colorado Water Trust is a private, nonprofit organization that engages in and supports voluntary efforts to restore and protect streamflows in Colorado to sustain healthy aquatic ecosystems. These efforts include water acquisitions, other creative transfers of water, on-the-ground physical solutions, and providing technical assistance to land trusts.

The City of Aspen is located high in the Rocky Mountains and is the 53rd largest city in the state. Two hundred miles southwest of Denver and 130 miles east of Grand Junction, it is at the southeastern end of the Roaring Fork Valley in Pitkin County and the Roaring Fork River flows right through town. Aspen is surrounded by the White River National Forest. Aspen encompasses 3.66 square miles and is a relatively flat valley floor surrounded on three sides by Aspen, Smuggler and Red Mountains. It was founded in 1880 and incorporated in 1881. Aspen is internationally renowned as a winter and summer resort.