

South Platte River Urban Waters Partnership (SPRUWP)
Full Partnership Meeting
March 6, 2025, from 2 to 4 PM
Meeting Summary - FINAL

ATTENDANCE

Participants: Carrie Aulton, Matt Ashley, Tamara Barbakova, Liz Bertrand, Judy Bloom, Maria Bumgarner, Michael Boeglin, Tanner Chapin, John Davenport, Drew Elmore, Stacey Eriksen, Stacey Fountain, Laurie Gilligan, Austin Goodman, Nicole Laurita, Melissa Merritt, Estella Moore, Khai Hoan Nguyen, Jordan Parman, Mackenzie Sanders, Carrie Smith, Will Sollish, Brian Tietze, Emilia Torrellas, Jeff Ullman, Travis Warziniak, and Abigail Wright

Facilitation team: Samuel Wallace and Lauren Cortez French

SPRUWP OVERVIEW

Samuel Wallace, SPRUWP Ambassador, provided an overview of SPRUWP for new partners. His presentation is summarized below.

- SPRUWP is part of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, a program established in 2011 that aims to bring together federal agencies to coordinate work within the 21 Urban Waters designated locations.
- The partnership's boundaries extend beyond the Denver metropolitan area to the montane ecosystems from which the South Platte River flows.
- SPRUWP's 70+ partners include state and federal entities, local municipalities and water providers, non-profits and community organizations, and academic institutions and research entities.
- SPRUWP's mission is to collaborate across jurisdictions and disciplines to engage communities and protect and restore the South Platte watershed. SPRUWP accomplishes this mission through the work of four groups: the Full Partnership, the Advisory Committee, the Science & Data Committee, and the Education & Outreach Committee.
- Participation in SPRUWP has various benefits for partners, including access to technical resources and expertise, networking and partnership opportunities, exposure to diverse perspectives for shared learning, awareness of local projects and research findings, and a competitive advantage for funding through funding opportunities specifically allocated to Urban Waters locations.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA) WATER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (TA) PROGRAM

Tamara Barbakova, EPA Region 8, provided an overview of the agency's Water Technical Assistance (WaterTA) program. This program connects communities to experts who help assess needs and implement drinking water, sewage, and stormwater solutions. Her presentation is summarized below.

- WaterTA provides free technical assistance (TA) to communities, nonprofits, and utilities to help strengthen their drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater systems. The program focuses on collaboration, communication, and transparency to provide holistic, project-based TA to participants.
- The EPA's WaterTA program serves as an umbrella program for 17 initiatives, each providing various services such as project planning and prioritization, studies and assessments, funding identification and application support, preliminary engineering reports, and community engagement and education assistance.

- WaterTA helps participants move their ideas and projects forward by connecting them with the initiative(s) and TA provider(s) that best meet their needs. Cadmus, Eastern Research Group, US Water Alliance, and teams from the University of New Mexico are examples of TA providers involved in the program. This wide range of TA providers allows the EPA to connect participants with providers who have regional or topical expertise that aligns with their needs.
- For most of the WaterTA initiatives, the public, non-profit communities, water systems and utilities, local governments, states, Tribes, and NGOs are eligible for assistance. Some initiatives also require requesters to be eligible for their state's State Revolving Fund (SRF). Private water systems, including private wells, are eligible for some initiatives. WaterTA encourages anyone curious to contact the program through this [form](#), even if they are unsure of their eligibility. If they are ineligible for WaterTA, staff can likely connect them with other resources.
- Once WaterTA receives a request for assistance, they review it and vet it with the state or Tribe from which the request came to discuss the challenge, identify all funding opportunities the requester is eligible for, and determine which other stakeholders should be engaged in the process. WaterTA will then connect the requester with a TA provider or share other relevant resources.
- Typically, the program's end goal is to help the requester develop and submit an application for funding to implement the requester's project. However, the program adapts to the requester's unique needs, and in some cases, the end goal may be to help the requester build capacity or become eligible for funding.
- Examples of services provided by a WaterTA provider, US Water Alliance:
 - Missoula, Montana
 - The City of Missoula was interested in pursuing stormwater improvements to improve its water system's resilience to water quality issues. The City requested assistance from WaterTA to help it prioritize and find funding for its project ideas.
 - US Water Alliance helped Missoula identify the two most feasible projects on its project list and created a matrix with an overview of potential funding opportunities to support those projects.
 - One of the priority projects required the involvement of an active non-profit to be eligible for funding. To fill this gap, US Water Alliance provided outreach, engagement, and logistical support to help the City and citizens establish a community watershed group.
 - Calumet City, Illinois
 - Following a major flood event in 2023, Calumet City recognized the need to mitigate flood risks and increase its resiliency by updating its stormwater and sewer infrastructure. The City requested assistance from WaterTA to determine how to prepare for and finance these major capital projects.
 - US Water Alliance and another TA provider are conducting several studies and financial assessments to determine how the City can fund its capital projects and equitably invest in community resilience. Studies include a market rate study for drinking water providers and a feasibility study to assess how the City could implement a stormwater fee to fund its projects.

Clarifying Questions about EPA's WaterTA Program

Meeting participants asked Tamara clarifying questions about the EPA WaterTA program. Questions are indicated in italics, and corresponding responses are listed below in plain text.

Given the current uncertainties in federal funding, potential requesters may be hesitant to engage due to concerns that funding for the program or TA providers might be halted. Does WaterTA anticipate the program being affected by the funding changes?

Because many of the WaterTA initiatives are well established and existed long before the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funding, they will likely continue to exist. Although the variety of initiatives and providers could decrease, no changes have been made at this time. TA providers are continuing their work and are eager to continue providing their services to requesters.

What kind of assistance can WaterTA provide related to climate adaptation and resilience?

WaterTA providers have conducted climate resilience assessments for drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater utilities. A town in Wyoming worked with a TA provider to create a climate resiliency framework for wildfire response and used it when a fire occurred one week after completion. Smaller communities have also worked with TA providers to identify their emergency contact network in the case of a wildfire, form resource-sharing relationships with neighboring communities, or determine infrastructure that could be updated to make their community more climate resilient.

Comments for Tamara

Groundwork Denver, a grassroots community organization, shared its interest in exploring opportunities to work with EPA's WaterTA program. Groundwork Denver's current work includes river clean-ups, water quality sampling to understand the effects of industrial activities on local waterways, and mitigating the impacts of the heat-island effect on communities by planting trees. Tamara shared ideas for how WaterTA could support Groundwork Denver, such as by helping the organization create pamphlets, videos, or other communication tools to educate communities about the heat-island effect. Groundwork Denver will follow up with Tamara to continue their conversation.

WATERNOW ALLIANCE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

Will Sollish, WaterNow Alliance, presented an overview of the TA programs and other resources that the organization provides to entities and individuals in the water sector. His presentation is summarized below.

- The WaterNow Alliance is a national nonprofit organization that provides TA and resources to local water leaders and decision-makers to advance an innovative, equitable, climate-resilient, and environmentally sustainable urban water sector.
- WaterNow's Project Accelerator program offers 250 hours of pro bono TA over a 6–12-month period to eligible entities to help them develop and implement sustainable solutions that meet local water needs.
 - WaterNow offers a wide range of services through the program, including project design and implementation, community and stakeholder engagement, policy and legal analysis, data analysis, and navigating funding opportunities.
 - Over 6 to 12 months, WaterNow co-creates and scopes a project with the entity, supports baseline research and stakeholder engagement, develops draft and final project materials, and then presents the deliverables to leaders or decision-makers.

- Eligible entities include utilities, cities, towns, special districts, other public entities responsible for drinking water, wastewater, or stormwater services, and non-profit partners that have clear ties to an eligible entity.
- WaterNow has supported more than 20 projects in Colorado through the Project Accelerator program. Information about these projects and how to apply for the program is available at this [link](#).
- Tap into Resilience (TiR) is a WaterNow Alliance initiative to support cities, towns, and water agencies who are interested in investing in the large-scale installation of ‘localized,’ or ‘decentralized,’ water infrastructure. More information about the TiR initiative can be found at this [link](#).
 - Localized, or decentralized, water infrastructure is installed on non-utility-owned properties. It can be more affordable and beneficial to ratepayers than upgrades to centralized infrastructure. Examples include graywater reuse systems, high-efficiency appliances, and lead service line replacements.
 - The program offers 300 hours of pro bono TA over a 6–12-month period to help TiR Pilot Communities navigate the legal, tax, and accounting aspects of financing and implementing a localized infrastructure project. More information about becoming a TiR Pilot Community can be found [here](#).
- WaterNow recently launched a new program that provides pro bono TA to help Colorado communities navigate and apply for the State’s Drinking Water Revolving Fund and Water Pollution Control Revolving Fund. The dashboard linked [here](#) provides information about the services provided, how to apply, and a library of helpful resources.
- WaterNow also offers resources and opportunities for individuals in the water sector, including [Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper \(QWEL\) Training](#), the [Emerging Leader Award](#), the [Transformative Water Leadership Academy](#), and free WaterNow Alliance [membership](#) for eligible water leaders.

Clarifying Question about WaterNow Alliance’s TA Programs and Resources

A meeting participant asked Will a clarifying question about WaterNow’s TA program offerings. The question is indicated in italics and the corresponding response is listed below in plain text.

Does WaterNow Alliance monitor or evaluate the post-implementation effectiveness of the water conservation programs it helps to develop, such as landscape transformation projects?

Since the WaterNow Alliance provides pro bono technical assistance for only 6 to 12 months, it primarily focuses on project design and implementation. The entity is generally responsible for long-term monitoring. However, WaterNow’s efforts are guided by reports and best practices from other organizations and agencies in the field to ensure that projects are robust and effective.

SPRUWP SCIENCE AND DATA COMMITTEE US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY (USGS) LAGRANGIAN STUDY PROPOSAL

Tanner Chapin, USGS Colorado Water Science Center, provided an overview of a proposal developed by the SPRUWP Science & Data Committee for USGS Urban Waters Federal Partnership cooperative funds to conduct a Lagrangian water quality study on the South Platte River. His presentation is summarized below.

- SPRUWP and the USGS conducted a Lagrangian-style study in 2020 to understand how nutrient concentrations change in the South Platte River and Cherry Creek as they run through the Denver metropolitan area. Lagrangian studies aim to sample the same parcel of water as it flows down a river or stream to understand how its physical and chemical characteristics change through time and space. The study identified wastewater treatment plants and golf courses as nutrient sources and the Burlington Ditch as a nutrient sink.

- The proposed 2025 study builds on the 2020 study by sampling additional constituents, including trace elements and salinity and turbidity measures, and collecting samples during baseflow, high-flow, and event-flow conditions. While all samples collected in 2020 were grab samples, the 2025 study will employ grab sampling, equal-width increment sampling for sites with poor mixing, and automatic samplers.
- The SPRUWP Science & Data Committee was interested in adding per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) to the list of constituents but was unsure of its feasibility. However, the USGS is exploring a potential partnership with the City of Thornton, which may have the capacity to process SPRUWP's samples for PFAS.
- The USGS Urban Waters Federal Partnership cooperative funding opportunity requires a matching fund contribution from the applicant. The Denver Department of Public Health & Environment (DDPHE) and Aurora Water have committed matching funds for the proposal. Metro Water Recovery has expressed interest in supporting the project through in-kind contributions. The USGS and the SPRUWP Ambassador have presented the proposal to other local water entities and have identified several who may be interested in providing matching funds.
- After match agreements are finalized, the USGS and SPRUWP will finalize the sampling strategy, which may be changed based on the total funding raised. The tentative sampling timeline includes high-flow sampling in May 2025, event-flow sampling in July and August 2025, and low-flow sampling in October 2025.
- Once sample collection and processing are complete, the USGS will review and analyze the data. Statistical analysis will likely include a multivariate principal component analysis (PCA) to identify similarities and differences in water quality between sampling locations, calculation of cumulative and diverted nutrient loads across sampling sites, and comparison of 2025 nutrient loads to those captured in 2020.
- The USGS will publish the study's findings in a peer-reviewed journal article and publicly release the study's data.

PARTNER UPDATES

SPRUWP partners shared organization-related updates. Their updates are summarized below.

Colorado Trout Unlimited (TU)

John Davenport, Colorado TU, is conducting an environmental DNA (eDNA) study with RiverMile to assess the composition of the fish community along a mile-long stretch of the South Platte River after TU stocked fish in September 2024. At the beginning of each month, John collects water samples at four equally spaced sites along the stretch and takes them to Heritage High School, where students conduct DNA extraction. Pisces Molecular in Boulder sequences the extracted samples for fish DNA. DNA sequencing has detected more than 30 different species in initial samples, including DNA from tropical and marine species that can be traced to the Denver aquarium. The results also suggest that the fish stocking did not have negative effects on smaller species in the river, like minnows.

Denver Department of Public Health and Environment (DDPHE)

- DDPHE is offering a free half-day workshop at Red Rocks Community College on Monday, March 31, from 12 to 4 PM, for all Denver residents. The workshop will teach homeowners how to design and install a residential laundry-to-landscape graywater system that is compliant with Denver and Colorado regulations. Information about the workshop can be found at this [link](#).

- There is an additional four-day course for Denver plumbing and construction professionals on how to design and install graywater systems compliant with Denver and Colorado regulations from April 1-4, 9 AM to 4 PM, at Red Rocks Community College. This course can result in Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL) certification. Information about the course can be found at this [link](#).
- A graywater networking mixer will be held at Colorado State University (CSU) Spur on April 1 from 4 to 6 PM. Representatives from DDPHE, CSU faculty, and other graywater experts will be in attendance. All are welcome to attend.

City and County of Denver's Office of Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resiliency

Denver's Office of Climate Action is conducting an analysis on Denver's natural resource management workforce ecosystem. The analysis aims to identify workforce gaps by partnering with community training providers and industry leaders, hosting focus groups, and conducting interviews and surveys. Anyone interested in participating in the study can reach out to Liz Bertrand at Elizabeth.Bertrand@denvergov.org.

SPRUWP

Stacey Eriksen, the partnership's EPA representative since its inception in 2011, is retiring. The partnership thanked her for her commitment to collaboration and for maintaining the group's momentum over the years.

NEXT STEPS

The next SPRUWP Full Partnership meeting will be held in about three months. Partners can expect to receive information via email about this meeting and other upcoming SPRUWP events, including a green infrastructure workshop, a field tour, and a series of organizational work planning workshops.