



**COLORADO WATER TRUST**  
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January 25, 2023

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**Colorado Water Trust led local partnership that boosted flows in the Upper Yampa River**

Steamboat Springs, CO, (January 25, 2023) – For 64 days this late summer and early fall, between August 12<sup>th</sup> and October 14<sup>th</sup> of 2022, Colorado Water Trust purchased and released 3,603 acre-feet (1.17 billion gallons) of water to boost flows in the Upper Yampa River during critical low flows. The releases varied in flow rate (cubic feet per second, or cfs) from 2.4 cfs to 65.7 cfs. The boosted flows accounted for more than half of the Yampa River in downtown Steamboat Springs for 10 days and for more than one-third of the River’s flow for 28 days (flow measurements are taken at the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge). Without the added water, the Yampa River may have dropped to as low as 34 cfs in downtown Steamboat Springs, and for as many as 24 days, flows may have been below 85 cfs, one of several critical thresholds for determining river closures (figure 1).

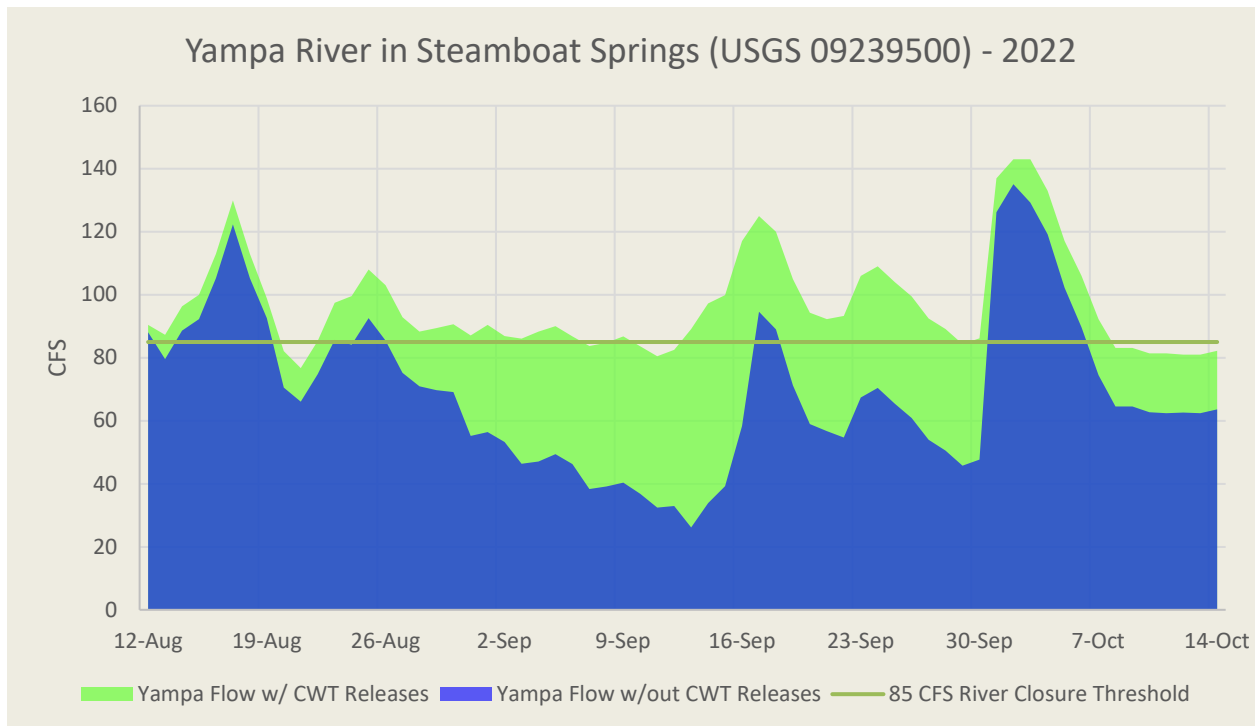


Figure 1. A comparison of Yampa River flows with and without CWT Releases

This effort, led by Colorado Water Trust, is possible thanks to a broad coalition of collaborators including the Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District, the City of Steamboat Springs, the Colorado Division of Water





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Resources, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Catamount Metropolitan District, the Colorado Water Conservation Board, and the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center.

Throughout the period of implementation for the project, Colorado Water Trust organized weekly meetings with the local community and beyond to discuss the project's impact and answer questions, gain feedback from attendees on observations from the ground, and discuss expectations and critical standards for the Yampa River. Attendees for those meetings included representatives from the Colorado Division of Water Resources, Colorado Water Conservation Board, Colorado River Water Conservation District, Friends of the Yampa, Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District, Yampa River Fund, Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program, Routt County, and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association.

*"As we continue to experience declining natural flows and warmer stream temperatures in the Yampa River, the releases from Stagecoach help to preserve water quality, protect fish and wildlife, and limit closures of the river to anglers and recreationists. This partnership not only benefits the river system and the community of Steamboat Springs, but users throughout the watershed." Julie Baxter, City of Steamboat Springs*

*"Coordination and collaboration with the Yampa River Community led to a successful program of improving streamflow in the Yampa during critical times last year. I appreciate all the input and local knowledge put forth throughout the planning process and look forward to building on our successes in the coming years." Blake Mamich, Colorado Water Trust.*

Since 2012, the Water Trust has fostered local efforts to restore the Yampa River. Over the past decade, the Water Trust has purchased and released over 17,805 acre-feet (5.6 billion gallons) of water to boost Yampa River flows. The impacts have been significant. Keeping the River from bottoming out throughout the dry summer and fall months supports not only the environment, including fish and wildlife that depend on the river, but also benefits local businesses and communities. The Water Trust is grateful for the hard work and collaboration of the community of Steamboat Springs, which has made this project possible through the years. Collaborative efforts on streamflow improvement in the Yampa River Basin may serve as a model for other basins in the State.

The Water Trust's increased impact on the Yampa River in 2022 is in large part thanks to a recently signed 10-year agreement with Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District (UYWCD). The new agreement sets the stage for increased opportunity for streamflow enhancement on the Yampa River throughout the next decade and provides flexibility to utilize several mechanisms for streamflow enhancement including a recently amended Colorado statute. In 2020, Colorado House Bill 20-1157 passed, which amended the statute governing the Colorado Water Conservation Board's Instream Flow and Natural Lake Level Program. The bill created additional tools for the temporary loan of water rights for instream flow use. Renewable loans through this program now allow for loaned water to be used for up to 5 years out of a 10-year approval period. Loans can be renewed twice, for a total of three 10-year periods. The statute previously only allowed for loaned water to be used for instream flow in 3 out of 10 years, was not renewable, and did not include the potential for increased flow rates necessary to *improve* the natural environment to a reasonable degree (previously it was limited to rates necessary to *preserve* the natural environment to a reasonable degree). The Water Trust and UYWCD are among the first collaborators in the State of Colorado to take advantage of this new tool and the first to successfully seek increased flow rates to improve the health of a river.





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*“The ability to utilize this new legislation and continue the partnerships developed over the last decade provides a lot of hope for the Yampa River during the uncertain times ahead. We are thankful for the amount of collaboration that happens here in the Yampa Valley and we’re glad to be a part of it.” Andy Rossi, Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District*

Colorado Water Trust, a statewide nonprofit organization with a staff of eight, raised the funds needed for the purchase and release of water to the Yampa River in 2022. In total, releases in 2022 cost Colorado Water Trust \$172,691, at a rate of \$47.93 per acre-foot. Half of the funds used to pay for this water were provided via Grant from the Yampa River Fund and the other half from other Colorado Water Trust donors, including Intel Corporation, Lyda Hill Philanthropies, Yampa Valley Community Foundation, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Kent and Katrina Fredrickson, and various other individual donors. In future years, if water is used for instream flow use under the renewable instream flow loan, funding will be sought from the Colorado Water Conservation Board’s Instream Flow and Natural Lake Level program.

