



COLORADO WATER TRUST

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Cold Mountain Ranch and Colorado Water Trust Partner to Bolster Flows in Crystal River

Carbondale, Co., (January 23, 2018) – Cold Mountain Ranch and the Colorado Water Trust finalized a pilot agreement intended to increase streamflows in the Crystal River in drier years. The three-year agreement, born out of the Crystal River Management Plan, will compensate the Cold Mountain Ranch owners, Bill Fales and Marj Perry, for retiming their irrigation practices to leave their irrigation water in the Crystal River when the river needs it most.

Cold Mountain Ranch relies on the Crystal River to irrigate pastures and hay fields that support its cow-calf operation. Under the agreement, the Water Trust will monitor flows in the river and if flows fall to 40 cubic feet per second (cfs) in August or September, the ranch may voluntarily decide to shift its diversion scheduling. The Water Trust will monitor and measure the changed practice and pay the ranch \$175 per cfs per day to encourage that shift. Once streamflows reach 55 cfs, payments would cease. The pilot agreement can restore up to 6 cfs in the Crystal River and has built-in incentives if other ranches choose to join.

The Crystal River drops out of the Elk Mountains above Marble and flows north to its confluence with the Roaring Fork River at Carbondale. The river supports a number of traditional ranching operations as well as towns, recreationalists, and fish populations. During the drought of 2012, demand for water outpaced supply, and the river went dry. Local entities Roaring Fork Conservancy and Public Counsel of the Rockies hosted meetings with water users to decide what, if anything, could be done for the river. Those meetings sparked the stream management planning process, and the final plan was released in 2016. It can be viewed at <http://www.roaringfork.org/your-watershed/crystal-river/stream-management-plan/>. Stream management planning is a critical and measurable objective outcome of Colorado's Water Plan.

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Drawing from the plan's river science and stakeholder group, the Water Trust proposed to water users options to reduce or retime their irrigation to improve flows in the river. This agreement is the first to come from that outreach. The agreement required input and review from Pitkin County and Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, the co-holders of a conservation easement on Cold Mountain Ranch.

"When we first began this conversation with the water users on the Crystal in 2012, we lacked the legal protections and the scientific basis to put agreements like this together," said Zach Smith, staff attorney for the Water Trust. "Now, we have a pilot agreement that is designed to improve the health of the Crystal River in partnership with agriculture. It could provide a model for other communities in Colorado as well."

The Water Trust would like to thank Cold Mountain Ranch, Public Counsel of the Rockies, the Roaring Fork Conservancy, Lotic Hydrological, WestWater Research, the Colorado River Water Conservation District, Pitkin County, Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, Bonneville Environmental Foundation, the Aspen Skiing Company Environment Foundation, Patagonia, and the funders and stakeholders of the Crystal River Management Plan for making this project possible.

ABOUT COLORADO WATER TRUST: The Colorado Water Trust is a private, nonprofit organization that restores water to Colorado's rivers in need. The Water Trust accomplishes its mission with voluntary, market-based projects.

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