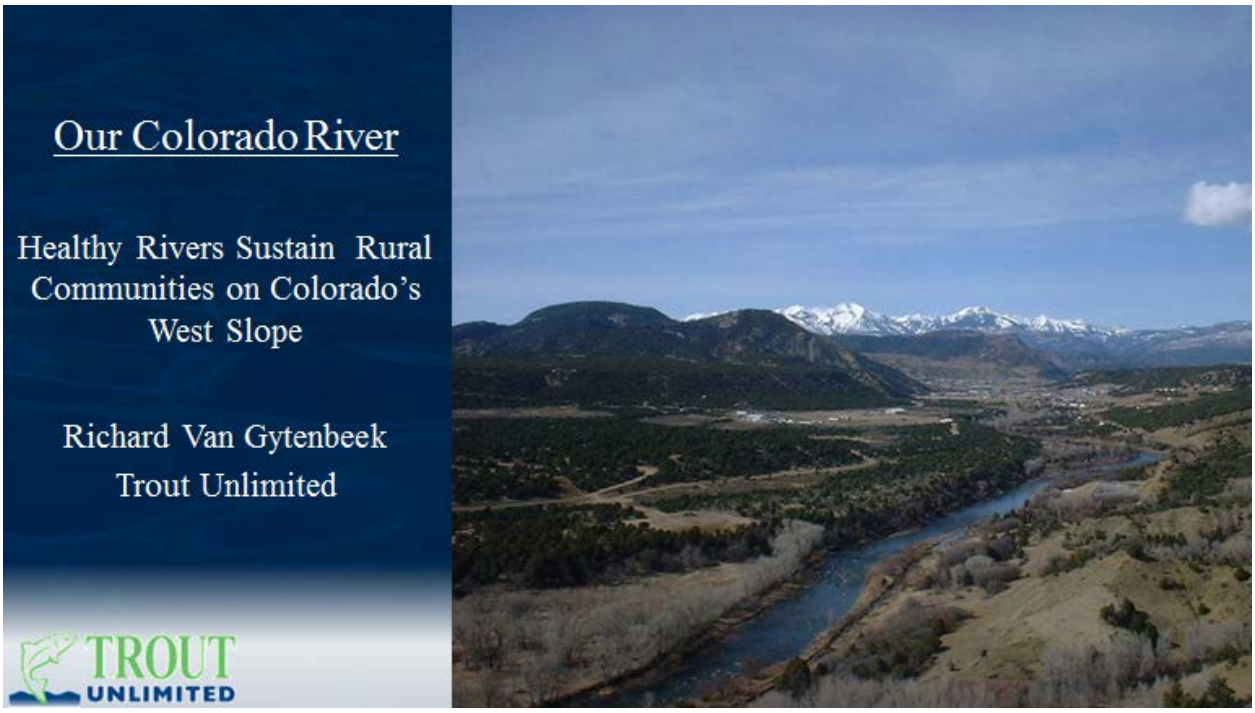



Richard Van Gytenbeek works for National Trout Unlimited-Colorado Water Project as their Colorado River Outreach Coordinator based out of Grand Junction.

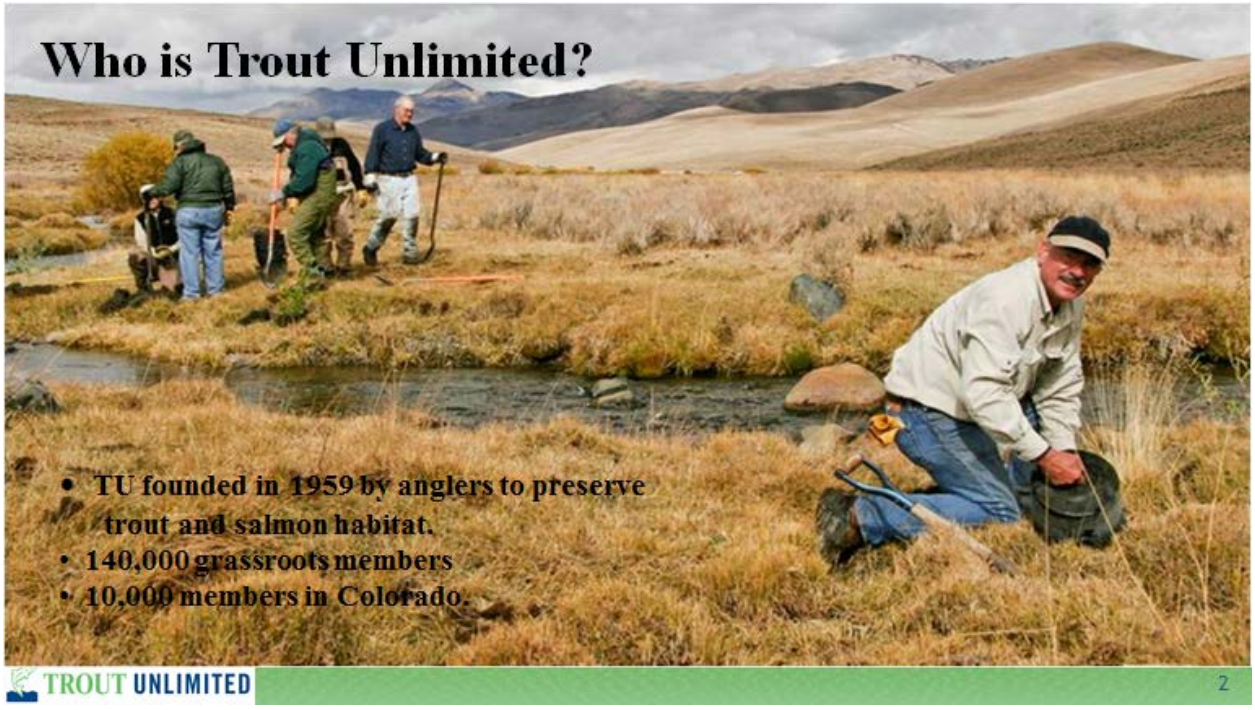
This presentation is an integral part of TU's "Our Colorado River" program and is provided to communities in the upper Colorado River Basin (UCRB). It highlights the importance of the river to sustainable rural communities in the upper Colorado River Basin.

The presentation focuses on three topics:

First-it looks at the two primary water users on Colorado's West Slope; agriculture and recreation and their economic and cultural importance to the UCRB.

Second-it looks at how TU is working with agriculture to sustain our UCRB rivers and the communities that rely on them.

Finally-it looks at the "Our Colorado River" program and its constituent parts.




TU is a sportsman based non-profit conservation organization.

Founded in 1959.

150,000 members nationwide.

10,000 members here in Colorado.

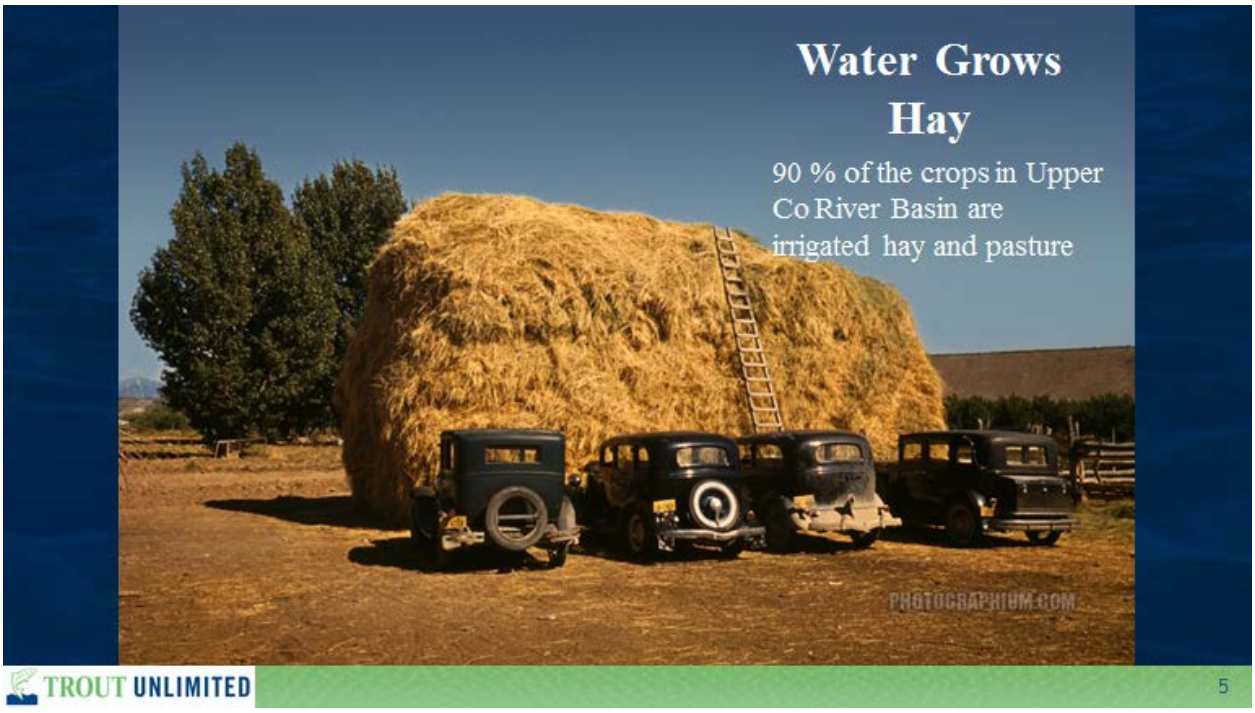
Nationally, our mission is to protect trout and salmon and to reconnect and restore their essential habitats.

In the west, where water has historically been for fighting, TU is striving to make water the focus of cooperation.

# Part 1

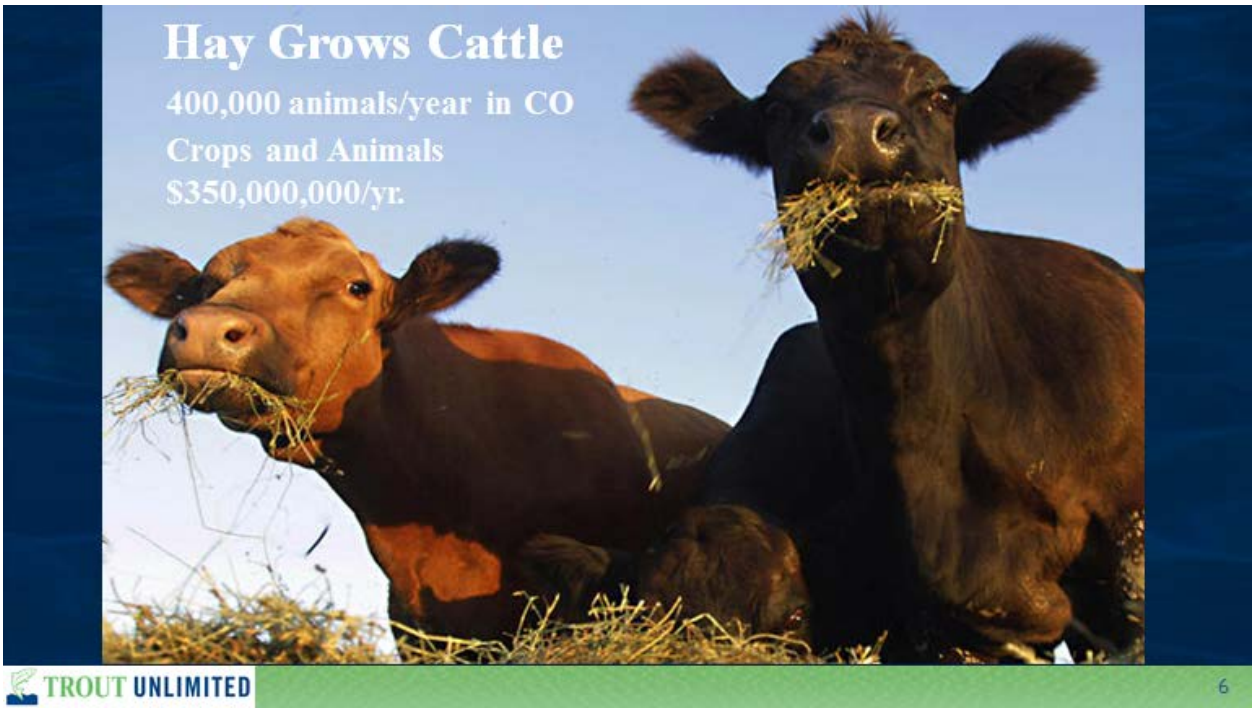
Who Are the Primary Water Users on the West Slope?

Agriculture-uses 90% of diverted water in the UCRB (in Colorado) to irrigate roughly 750,000 acres of hay and irrigated pasture on about 9000 farms and ranches in western Colorado.



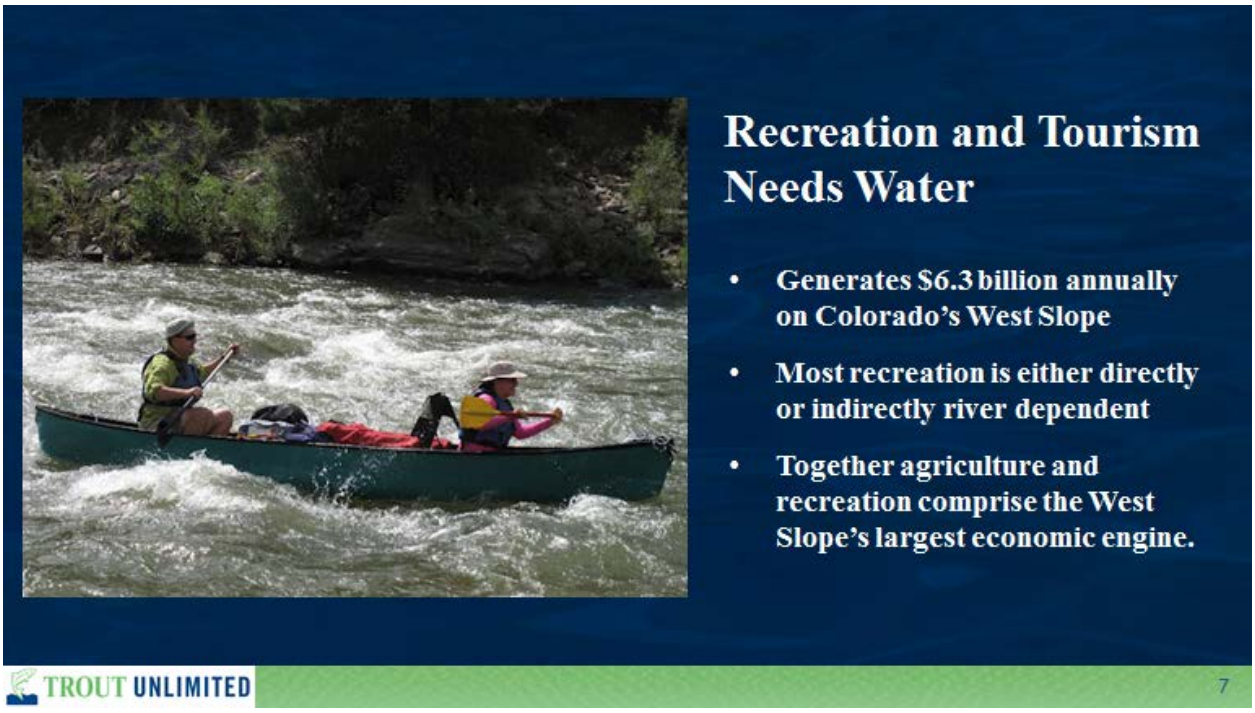

Diverted water is used to grow, primarily hay and irrigated pasture.

Pasture and hay crops account for 90%, the remaining 10% grows grain, vegetables, fruit and grapes and is focused in the lower elevation areas: Grand and Uncompahgre valleys.




Hay and pasture is primarily dedicated to growing animals-primarily in cattle operations.

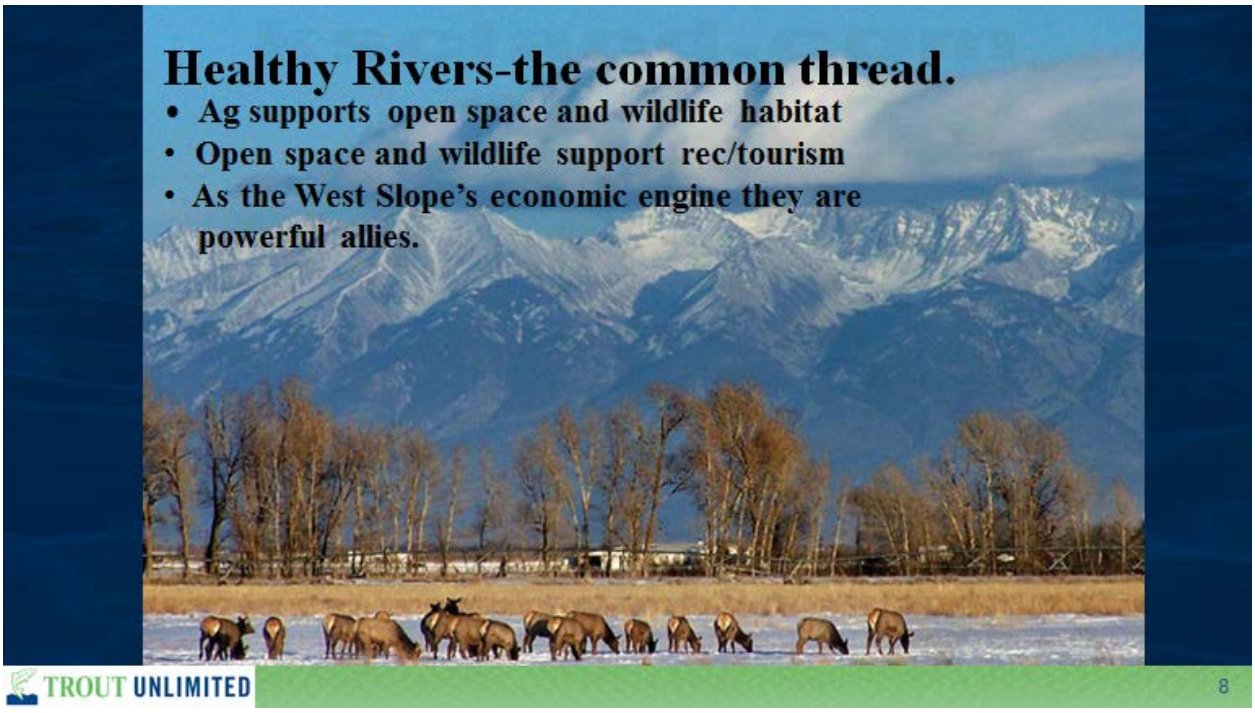
These operations send approximately 400,000 animals to markets each year from the west slope. Crops and animal sales (direct) from west slope communities exceed 350 million each year.




West Slope recreation and tourism have become big business generating by recent estimates, over 6 billion annually.

It's important to note that the recreation and tourism industry (and the revenue noted) involves many different activities such as rafting, fishing, camping, skiing, wildlife watching and many others. The revenue number also includes ancillary sales such as rooms, food and fuel. While some of the activities noted are not directly river dependent, most are.

However, the important point is that taken together West Slope agriculture and recreation/tourism comprise the largest economic engine in Colorado's western valleys.

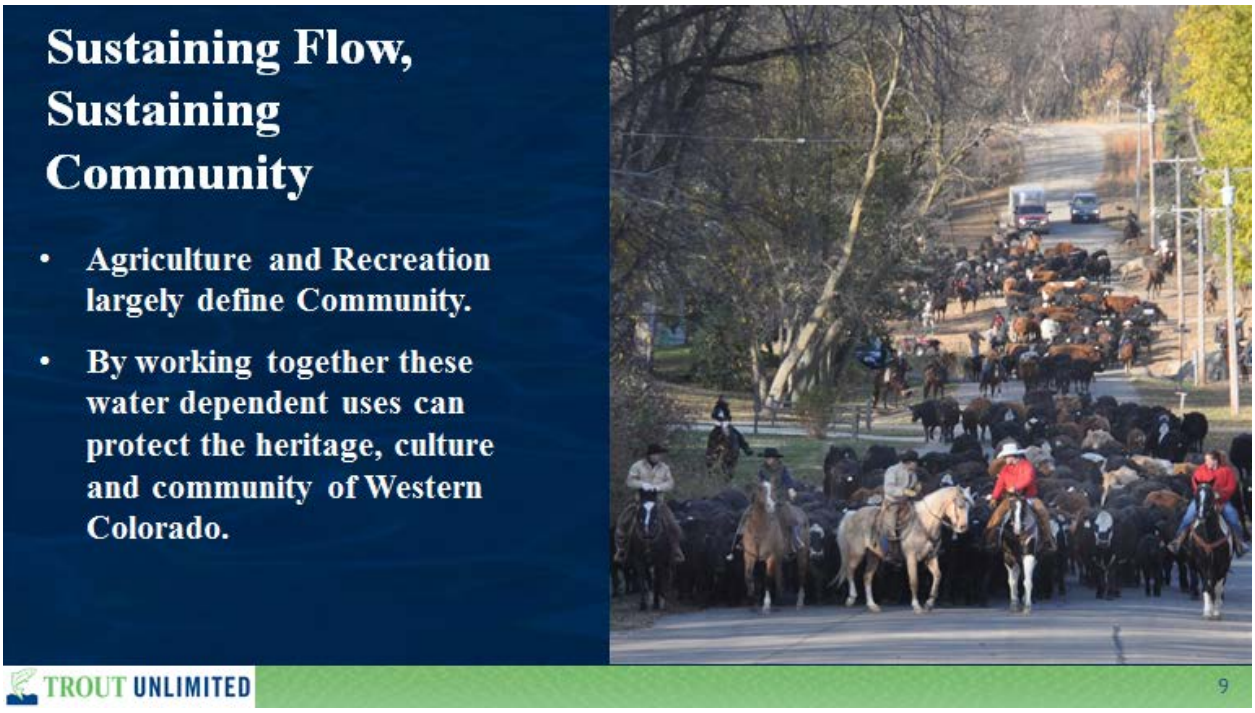



While dependency on the river is obvious for these river users, the interdependency between agriculture, recreation and tourism is also important…amongst themselves, as well as their community. This unique relationship between river, river user and community is highlighted by these relationships.

Agriculture protects large tracts of open space, riparian habitat, wetlands and crucial/critical winter habitat. These tracts of land define the iconic western landscape and sustain much of our wildlife habitat.

Recreation and tourism rely on these open spaces to attract visitors and maintain our western landscapes as well as our abundant wildlife species.

As the West Slope's most powerful economic engine agriculture, recreation and tourism have the cooperative power to protect their common resource and thereby sustain their livelihoods and communities.




Agriculture and Recreation/Tourism depend on adequate water supplies.

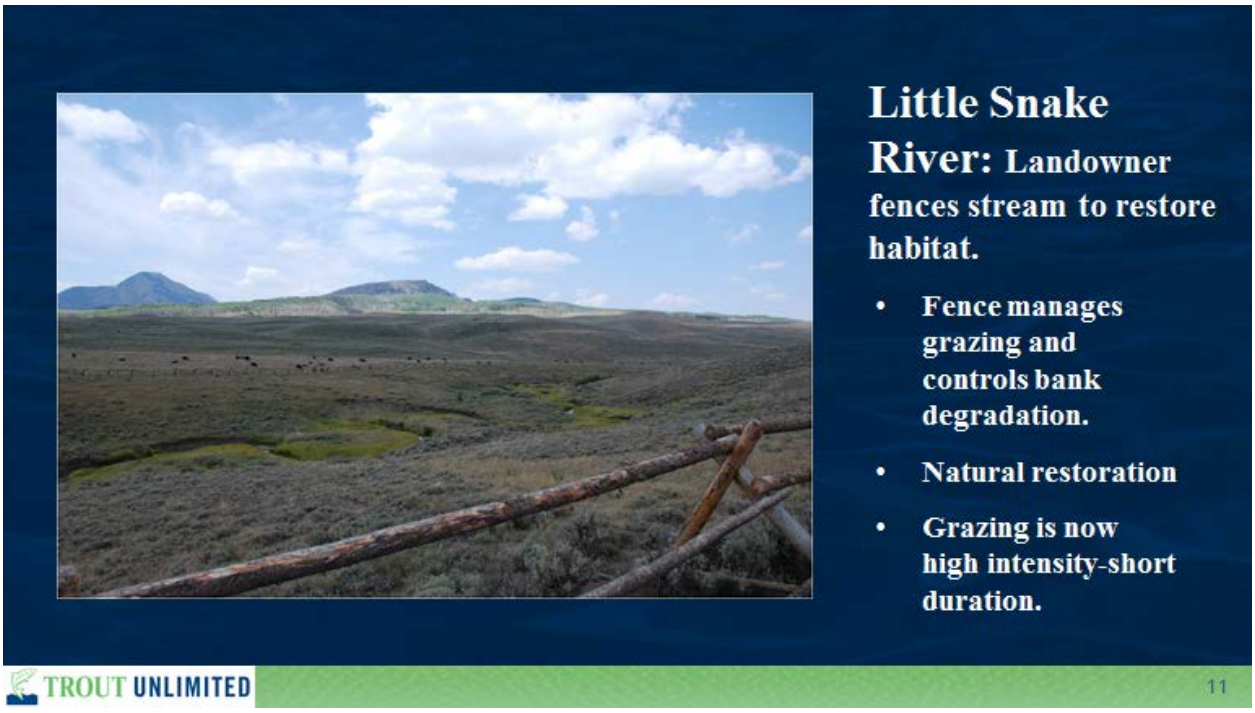
Agriculture and Recreation/Tourism provide the economic backbone of our West Slope communities as well as defining our heritage and culture.

Agriculture and Recreation/Tourism are sustainable uses supporting sustainable communities.

Working together, Agriculture and Recreation can protect the heritage, culture and community of western Colorado.

## Part 3

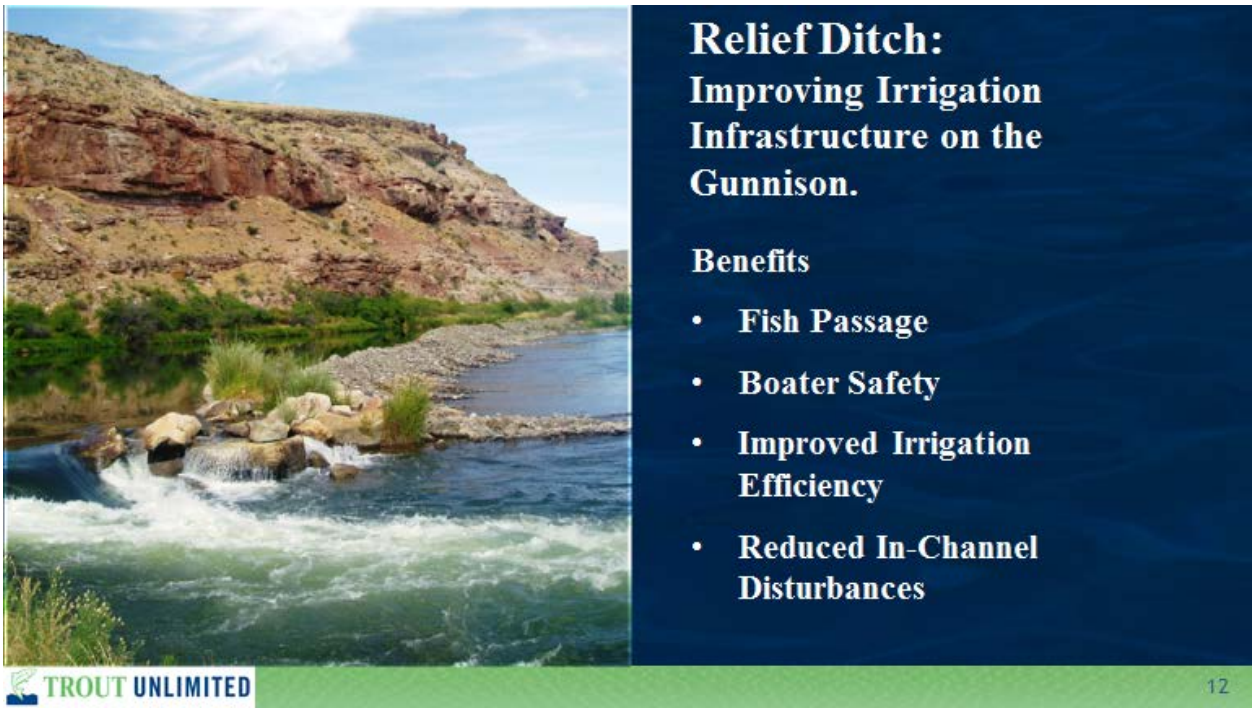
TU believes that water is for cooperating. The organization does that by seeking projects with the agricultural community which are mutually beneficial to the parties and the resource. TU is able to provide design and construction mgt. for these projects, apply for grants and bring dollars to the table. The following are just some examples of “on the ground” projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin. They include habitat restoration, improving irrigation infrastructure and employing the concept of water sharing to increase stream flows.




This is an example of a “passive” restoration project in the Little Snake River drainage along the Co/Wy. border. It is a CRC fishery…impacted by cattle grazing other land use practices. Passive restoration projects rely on nature to improve habitat. Restoration can also involve man-made structures placed in channel which can accelerate the recovery process.

TU and the Landowner partnered in the construction an ex-closure fence along both banks to keep the cattle away from the stream… allow a recovery period for vegetation and for spring flows to narrow and deepen the channel. Cattle are now permitted to return to the ex-closed area on a short duration-high intensity use pattern which enables continued utilization of available forage.

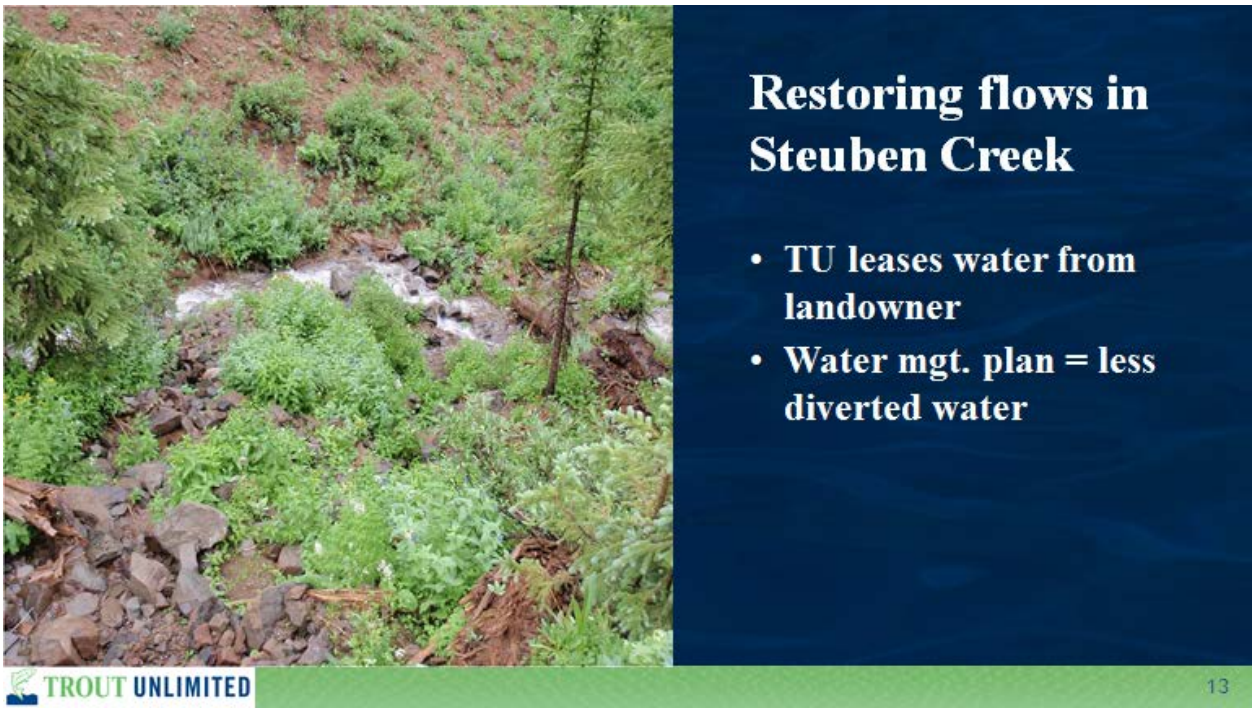
It is also noteworthy because by restoring this section of the creek it has allowed small populations of trout, located upstream of the damaged section to reconnect with the main population downstream.




The Relief Ditch, also on the Gunnison is one of our current irrigation improvement projects. It is slated for completion in Spring 2013.

Reconstruction will improve irrigation efficiency, benefit fish passage, increase boater safety and eliminate in-channel disturbance.

Again, TU is always looking for projects that help the river and the people that use the river.



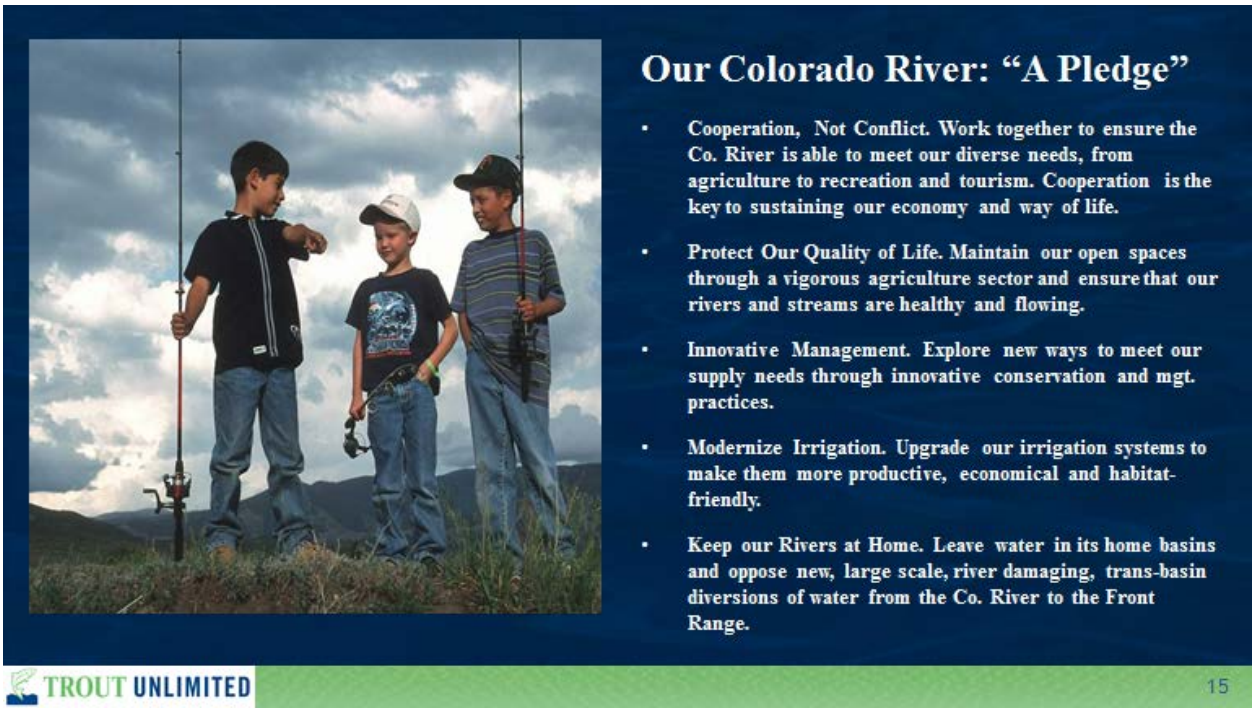

Our final example is a project which can be characterized as a water sharing project which helps to boost flows for Cutthroat Trout.

Historically, water in Steuben Creek is conveyed to a reservoir in an adjacent drainage. It is then released and applied to hay fields on a downstream ranch.

Last season TU paid the owner to fallow one of his hay fields and used that water to augment Steuben Creek flows.

TU is continuing to work with the landowner to evolve a longer term arrangement that will be beneficial to owner and resource.

Part 3-The "Our Colorado River" Program has a number of components. Website, Voices video, Brochure and the key component our Pledge.




The "Our Colorado River" Pledge is a declaration of five principles which, if practiced, will sustain our West Slope communities by protecting our critical water resources and those that depend on the rivers and streams of the UCRB.

The principles are:

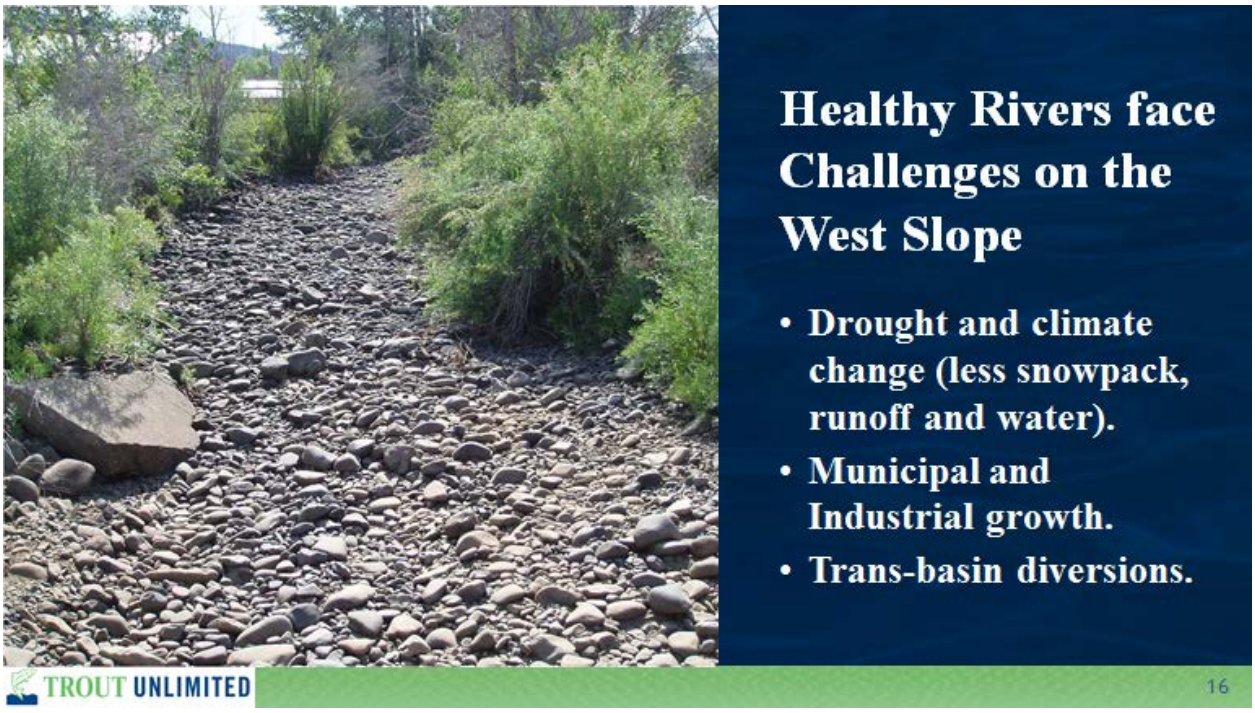
Cooperation, Not Conflict: Work together to ensure the Colorado River is able to meet our diverse needs, from agriculture to recreation and tourism. Cooperation is the key to sustaining our economy and way of life.

Protect our Quality of Life: Maintain our open spaces through a vigorous agricultural sector and ensure that our rivers and streams are flowing and healthy.

Innovative Management: Explore new ways to meet our water supply needs through innovative conservation and management practices.

Modernize Irrigation: Upgrade our irrigation infrastructure systems to make them more productive, economical and habitat-friendly.

Keep our Rivers at Home: Leave water in its home basins and oppose new, large-scale, river damaging, trans-basin diversions of water from the Colorado River to the Front Range.

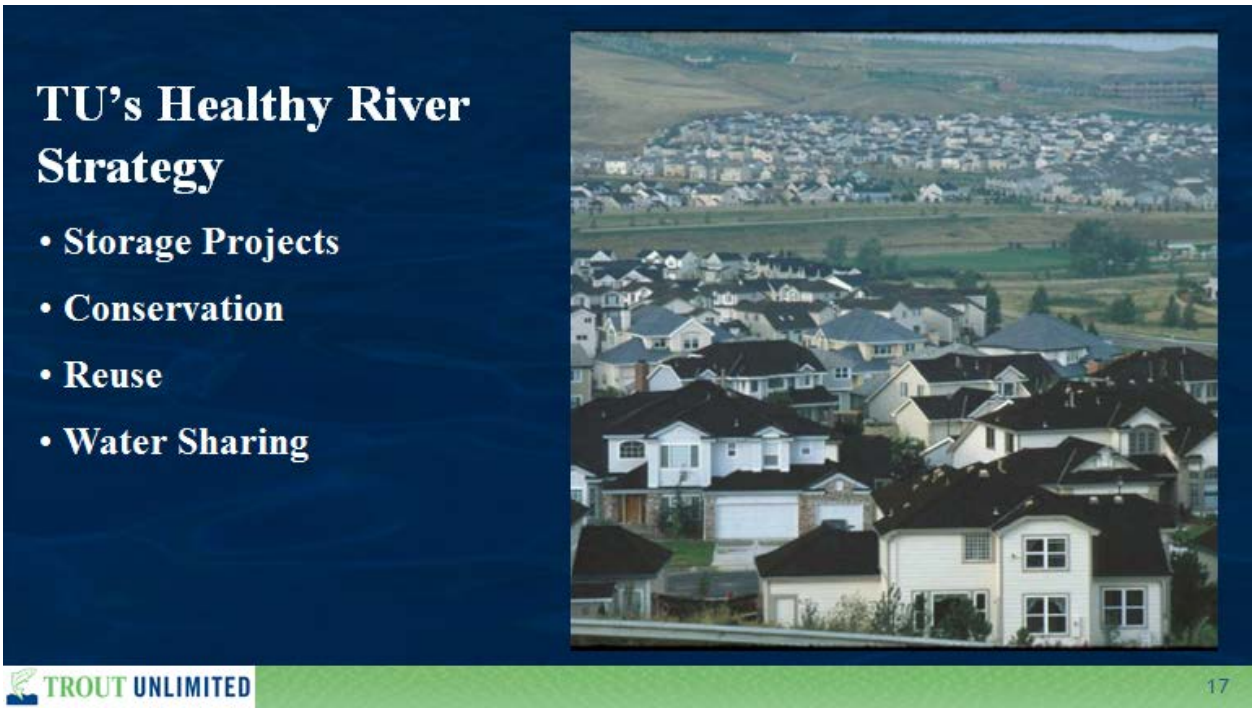



In the UCR basin three primary threats to healthy rivers exist.

Climate change appears to be part of our world, this will mean higher temps, less snowpack and less water in a system which is seasonally renewable but ultimately limited.

Municipal growth along the front range is expected to double in size in the next 40 years, along with the industrial component this growth may need an additional 5 MAF. That is basically what the Colorado River main-stem generates each year in Colorado.

While estimates predict there is some excess water available in the upper Colorado River basin…..water required for continued growth on the Front Range must come from alternate sources and methods.  Further new, large scale, environmentally damaging trans-basin diversions can be avoided if the Front Range adopts TU's "Healthy River Strategy".




TU's Healthy River Strategy-How can the Front Range help to avoid continued, large scale, trans-basin diversions?

Storage Projects- New water storage will be necessary to meet future water supply needs, however, we can minimize impact to our rivers by enlarging existing reservoirs and by creating smaller "off channel" reservoirs.

Conservation-can be accomplished through utility rate structures, infrastructure maintenance, low flow plumbing devices and new development that conserves water through land planning and water saving landscapes.

Reuse-the process of using and reusing the same water to extinction.

Water Sharing-avoids "buy and dry" by allowing agricultural water right holders to lease water voluntarily, temporarily and to be compensated. It is also important that they do this without harming other water right holders.

The "Our Colorado River" website. On-line at "ourcoriver.com".