

## CHERRY CREEK STEWARDSHIP PARTNERS

### PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

#### 2019 Highlights

The Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners were founded in 1998 as a forum for the active stewardship of the Cherry Creek Watershed both above and below the Cherry Creek Dam. By compiling the education and outreach priorities of other local agencies and districts in the watershed the Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners created the Cherry Creek Basin Stewardship and Education Initiative. This document serves as a needs assessment and provides a set of recommendations for future efforts to engage the public with informational and educational programs in addition to the stormwater requirements in section 72.7. The Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority, identified as the designated water quality management agency for the Cherry Creek watershed, provides significant funding and expertise in order to accomplish public education and participation goals.

In addition to providing tours and events that remind watershed residents of their ability to reduce pollution from sources that could be mobilized during storm events, the Partners promote awareness of the value and function of the many pollution abatement projects that have been constructed in the Cherry Creek Basin with funding from the Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority and their valuable partners: Stormwater Permittees for Local Awareness of Stream Health (SPLASH), Mile High Flood District, Arapahoe and Douglas County Open Space Programs, the Cities and Towns of Aurora, Castle Rock, Centennial, Denver, Lone Tree, Parker, Parker Jordan Metropolitan District, Colorado State Parks and Great Outdoors Colorado.

#### GETTING TO KNOW THE WATERSHED

Since 2006, the Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners start the year off by getting outdoors for Hawk Walk. This annual January event brings neighbors to Cottonwood Creek to learn about the innovative stream reclamation project that reduces phosphorus loading to Cherry Creek Reservoir.



Outings like Hawk Walk, Equinox and Solstice tours of the Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park and guided hikes on Cherry Creek provide opportunities for the community to understand the investment that has been made in the Cherry Creek Basin to protect and enhance our natural resource heritage. Cold temperatures in the spring caused some cancellations.

Even with the unusually cold and wet weather in 2019, the Partners encouraged over 600 students and adults to come outside and explore what makes the Cherry Creek Watershed so special.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners serve as a resource to individuals who want to be actively involved in caring for Cherry Creek. Serious downcutting on Shop Creek, a tributary to Cherry Creek in Cherry Creek State Park, prompted frequent park users and bird watchers to request a meeting to look into the causes and possible remediation of this disturbance.



Experts from Colorado Parks & Wildlife, City of Aurora, Army Corps of Engineers, R2R Engineers and others met in the field to take a look at the erosion that could expose important water infrastructure in the Park. Concerns that a receding water table could have an adverse impact on the Cottonwood forest and habitat on Shop Creek brought everyone together to find practical solutions that protect public health. 'Working with nature' is a hallmark of the partnerships that are so effective in the Cherry Creek Basin. Inter-agency cooperation is strong and provide opportunities for professional and technical experts to evaluate the effectiveness of pollution abatement projects (PAP) and assess the need for maintenance.

## PROTECTING OUR ASSETS

In another example of inter-agency cooperation, the Wetlands Harvesting Committee was formed to take a look at the maintenance of man-made wetlands. Over time these built structures fill in with vegetation and become indistinguishable from natural wetlands. This increased vegetation will, over time, reduce the effectiveness of the pollution abatement project (PAP). Neighbors and nature lovers want to know that wildlife will be protected and important wetland and riparian habitat will continue to flourish even when maintenance activities need to occur.

The Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners maintain relationships with the community to ensure that all stakeholders and interested individuals have the opportunity to be informed and engaged in the stewardship and protection of the natural features in the Cherry Creek Basin.



## HEADWATERS

Looking to the upper reaches of the Cherry Creek watershed (and our sister watersheds) we find opportunities to engage with agriculture and silviculture practices, individual sewage disposal systems, large lot development greater than one acre (from an agricultural perspective considered small acreage landownership), and other potential nutrient sources. Working with Douglas County and Kiowa Conservation Districts, Colorado State University Extension Services, Master Gardeners and Douglas County Open Space the Partners provide educational tours and workshops such as the 2019 Teacher Training Workshop in partnership with the Colorado Foundation for Agriculture and the Colorado Agricultural Leadership Foundation at Lowell Ranch in Douglas County.





## SCHOOL AND TEACHER ENGAGEMENT

### DENVER METRO REGIONAL SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FAIR

The Denver Metro Regional Science and Engineering Fair proves to be one important opportunity to engage students and their teachers in watershed stewardship. By promoting better understanding of the purpose and effect of public works and water quality programs, more young people gain awareness of the challenges of protecting public health and the environment. Since 1999, the first year that the Basin Authority sponsored the Science Fair, we have seen a marked increase in water-related projects. In 2019 there were over 30 projects considered ranging from post-fire erosion experiments to exploring the potential of iron oxide to reduce algae growth. The Stewardship Partners value recognizing brilliant, young minds!



Raegan Knobbe, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at the Challenge School in the Cherry Creek District, received her award from Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners Educator Mallory Hiss. The Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority sponsors the Science Fair each year and provides this award in recognition of excellence and outstanding achievements in Environmental Science.

Raegan received the award in 2019 for her project  
“Impact of Nonpoint Source Pollution from Farms in the Denver Area on Water Quality”.



## **WATER FESTIVALS AND FIELD EXPERIENCES**

Nearly 350 students from West Middle School were given the opportunity to explore water quality at the 2019 Water Festival at Cherry Creek State Park. With over 20 volunteers at 8 unique stations, the students explored the physical properties of water with H2Olympics and other activities including macroinvertebrate identification and testing water samples for pH, phosphorus, nitrogen and E. coli. Volunteers were not discouraged by snow and cold weather and brought bugs and creek water to the classroom so the exploration could continue.

The Aurora Water Festival is another highlight of our water year. The Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners presented the Project WET module “Incredible Journey” to over 100 5<sup>th</sup> graders in May of 2019. Support for our watershed partners help reinforce a local water quality message and build strong community support for all education and outreach efforts in the Cherry Creek Basin.

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE AND A WATER QUALITY MESSAGE**



The 17-Mile House Farm Park is a prominent open space park owned and managed by the people of Arapahoe County by their support of the Arapahoe County Open Space Tax. The Cherry Creek Valley Historical Society hosts monthly open-house events with tours of the house and barn providing unique opportunities to engage the interested public to provide valuable information relating to land use, water quality and watershed stewardship.

In 2019 the Partners hosted school age students and their parents to explore the cultural and natural history as seen through the lens of an 1860s-era farm at the 17-Mile House Farm Park. Here students are invited to explore their ‘inner wildlife’ as they explore the landscape and practice their outdoor observation and play skills. We believe you are never too young, or too old, to learn about stormwater, flood protection and the value of our natural resource heritage.

Programming at the 17-Mile House Farm Park is a valuable collaboration among Arapahoe County Open Space, Cherry Creek Valley Historical Society Cherry Creek State Park and the Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners.

Again, a cold wet spring in 2019 caused the cancellation of several school field experiences making the rare sunny, warm days that much more welcome and enjoyed.

## THE RIGHT MESSAGE AT THE RIGHT TIME IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Regularly recurring activities bring the community in contact with the changing character of protected open space and naturalized areas. Spring and Fall Equinox hikes are scheduled every year at the Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park, the site of extensive stream stabilization funded in partnership with Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority, Mile High Flood District, Arapahoe County Open Space and others. Summer and Winter Solstice hikes are also held at the Ecological Park. All events at the Cherry Creek Valley Ecological Park are made possible with support from the Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority, Southeast Metro Stormwater Authority, Stormwater Permittees for Local Awareness of Stream Health (SPLASH), Parker Jordan Metropolitan District and the City of Centennial, Denver Audubon Society and the Cherry Creek Stewardship Partners.



Surprisingly, the 2019 Summer Solstice Walk was colder than the Winter Solstice Walk!







## **NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT**

Master Gardeners with the Colorado State University Extension Service help local gardeners understand the chemistry of their yard and garden soil at the annual 'Fall Into Fertilizer' event, presented with the generous support of the Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority and Tagawa Garden Center and Nursery in Centennial, Colorado. Proper application of fertilizers is essential to protecting water quality in the Cherry Creek watershed.





## **ANNUAL CHERRY CREEK WATERSHED CONFERENCE**

Every year in November, the Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority is co-sponsor of the annual Cherry Creek Watershed Conference. In 2019 the Conference was held at the Parker Arts and Cultural Events Center in Parker, Colorado. Over 130 local water quality professionals, engineers and practitioners gathered to review the year's accomplishments, learn from each other and acknowledge the significant contributions of the public and private interests that contribute to long term stewardship of the Cherry Creek Watershed.



## **THANK YOU**

With broad support from local jurisdictions and the Cherry Creek Basin Water Quality Authority, the Partners bring students of all ages and area residents out to the Creek to learn the history and ecology of the Cherry Creek watershed. Events and outings are posted on their website: [www.cherry-creek.org](http://www.cherry-creek.org) You are invited to join the Partners on any of their excursions. Come on out to the Creek!