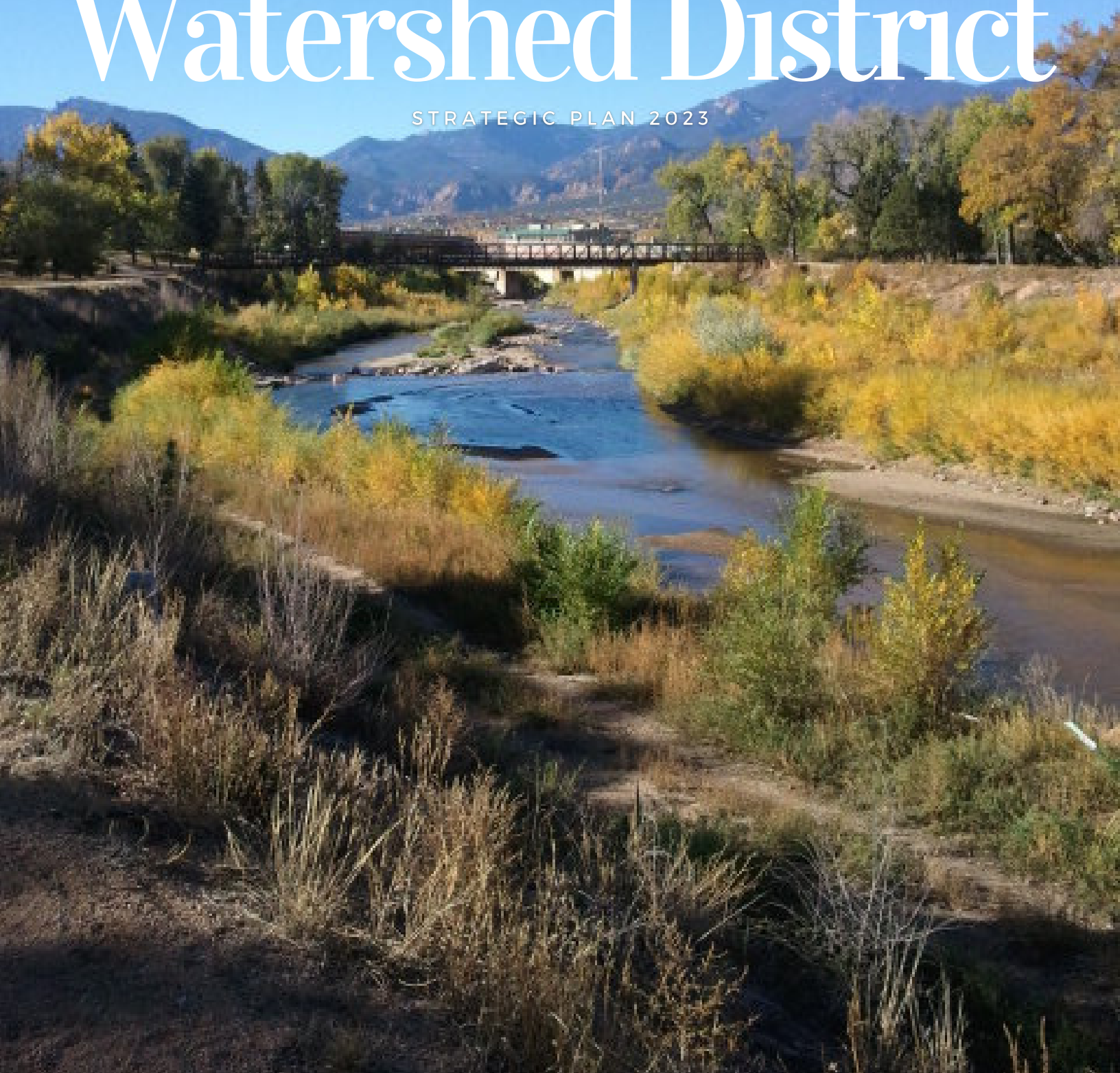




# Fountain Creek Watershed District

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023



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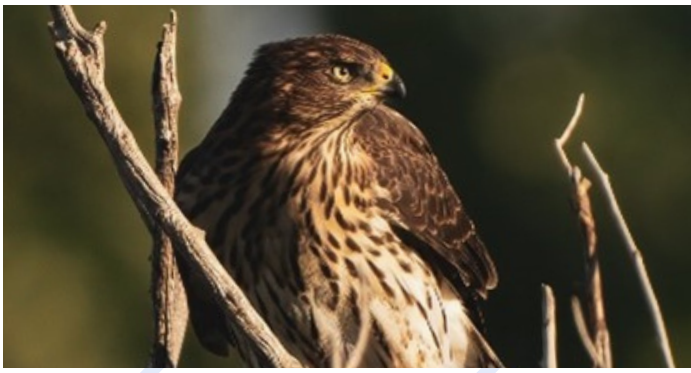
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# A letter from the Executive Director

The Fountain Creek Watershed is a story of unrealized potential. When former US Senator Ken Salazar toured our watershed in 2006, he quickly called attention to the possibilities of our waterways – recognizing our watershed as a crown jewel of our region. Reflecting on his observations a group of local leaders began a 2+ year process of public engagement, confirmed the need for a watershed-scale effort, and led to the establishment of the Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and Greenway District through state legislation in 2009.

Our Fountain Creek Watershed encompasses 927 square miles of southern Colorado's Front Range. The watershed stretches from its northern boundary at the Palmer Divide, partway up Highway 24 to the west, and joins the mighty Arkansas River at its confluence and southern boundary in Pueblo. With over fifty tributaries joining it as it flows south, the water that flows through our communities eventually ends up in the Gulf of Mexico. The waters that flow through our communities along the I-25 corridor have a national impact, and we as a headwaters state have a responsibility to care for our waterways for ourselves and for all of our downstream neighbors.

Prior to the establishment of the many towns and cities that dot southern Colorado, Fountain Creek and its tributaries were intermittent streams. These creeks did not contain water year round, rather water passed through their channels during spring snow melts or as storms moved through the water basin. However, after 150 years of development that has changed the landscape of the watershed, Fountain Creek is now a perennial stream with water moving through its channels year-round.

Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and Greenway District was established in 2009 by the State Legislature to manage, administer, and fund capital improvements to protect and enhance the health of the Fountain Creek Watershed. Funded by \$50 million from Colorado Springs Utilities, the District has completed projects that have improved conditions and restored native riparian habitats to thousands of feet of bank along the Fountain Creek. These projects have improved the natural beauty of our region, created habitats for native birds, plants, and other flora and fauna, while creating recreational opportunities for residents. The District has created unparalleled collaboration between Pueblo and El Paso Counties in fostering partnerships that have significantly improved the quality of our region's largest shared resource. Additionally, the District has received state and national recognition for its public outreach and engagement programs – highlighting not only the District's capacity to bring complex projects that enhance our region's natural beauty to life, but also in engaging the public to protect our region's waterways.

With the original \$50 million dollars nearly spent, and much more work to do across the watershed, it's time to create a new strategic plan that helps set the priorities and vision for how our region comes together to create the next generation of possibilities that transform the Fountain Creek Watershed into the crown jewel of southern Colorado Senator Salazar envisioned.

**ALLI SCHUCH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



# What We've Accomplished

In the fourteen years of its existence, the District has established itself as a regional leader, partner, resource, and collaborator for its member governments and citizens. The Board, staff, and volunteers who have engaged with the District's work have accomplished a lot in a challenging environment. Between relationship development, project partnerships, grants received, award-winning outreach programming, and community impact, the District has become an asset to our region.

In order to identify the most efficient and effective projects to be developed with limited dollars using sound science, the District and its partners have initiated and funded twelve individual management plans and studies and contributed to a number of others. Planning partners have included Colorado Springs Utilities, Lower Arkansas Water Conservancy District, United States Air Force Academy, Department of Local Affairs, Palmer Land Conservancy, and El Paso County. Those plans have been utilized by District member governments and have advised District and others' plans and projects. Many of these plans would not have been completed without the District's support.

# District Planning Projects

Year Completed	Location	Project Name
2011	El Paso and Pueblo Counties	Fountain Creek Corridor Restoration Master Plan
2012	El Paso and Pueblo Counties	Fountain Creek Watershed Policy Evaluation Report
2015	El Paso and Teller Counties	Fountain Creek and Cheyenne Creek Flood Restoration Master Plan
2016	El Paso County	Monument Creek Flood Restoration Master Plan
2016	Pueblo County	District DCM and Floodplain Regulations
2017	El Paso and Pueblo Counties	Fountain Creek WARSSS Report
2017	Pueblo and El Paso Counties	Fountain Creek Flood Control Study - Needs Assessment
2017	El Paso County	Fountain Reservoir Concept Evaluation
2019	El Paso and Pueblo Counties	Fountain Creek Corridor Floodplain Management Opportunities Study
2019	Pueblo County	Williams Creek Channel Evaluation
2020	El Paso County	Southmoor Drive Bank Stabilization Assessment

# Shovels in the ground: 13 years of watershed improvements

The District's Monetary Mitigation Fund Advisory Committee (MMF) has responsibly managed the \$50 million dollars from Colorado Springs Utilities. To date, over \$33 million dollars in creek restoration work has been accomplished on thirteen projects. Funding partners included CDOT, El Paso County, and the Colorado Water Conservation Board. The District is currently engaged in an Effectiveness review on its projects, which will provide qualitative and quantitative data on the success of the restoration work since they were completed. Although the SDS dollars are nearly depleted, the District has identified at least a billion dollars in other project work needed across the watershed. Not only is there no current funding for maintenance in the watershed or the completed projects, but it also has no funding for restoration projects outside of the southern portion of Fountain Creek, and there is work to be done in all of the municipalities within the watershed.



# Completed District Projects

Year Completed	Location	Project Name
2011	Pueblo County	Pueblo Off-Channel Detention Basin
2011	Pueblo County	Pueblo Sediment Collection/Removal
2014	Pueblo County	El Centro del Quinto Sol
2014	El Paso County	Frost Ranch Bank Stabilization
2016	Pueblo County	Masciantonio Trust Bank Stabilization
2016	Pueblo County	Pueblo Levee Dredging
2017	Pueblo County	Hwy 47 Channel Restoration
2018	Pueblo County	Pinon Bridge Channel Restoration
2019	Pueblo County	Overton Road
2020	Pueblo County	Young Hollow Channel Modifications (Mascianttonio)
2018-2021	Pueblo County	13th St Channel Restoration
2020	Pueblo County	Barr Farm Phases 1 & 2 Channel Restoration
2021	El Paso County	Hanson Trail Head Channel Improvements
2022	Pueblo County	Pueblo Levee Phase 1 & 2

# Community Engagement

Outreach and education have always been a strong suit for the District. Established in 2014, the Creek Week Cleanup has become the largest cleanup effort in the state and the country. Thousands of volunteers in 10+ communities come together over nine days to remove trash and create a healthier watershed. Creek Week also supports the Litter Letter Project, where volunteers fill huge wire letters with trash to form a word. This trash art is on display during October, Arts Month, in America the Beautiful Park. Creek Week also hosts a “Clean and Crawl,” a downtown cleanup and pub crawl in Colorado Springs. Volunteers ages 21+ work their way down Tejon Street making stops at local establishments for games, beverages, and prizes as they clean up this urban area.



Another unique and award-winning program the District initiated is the Brewshed Alliance. This is a consortium of 20+ breweries across the watershed that are partners in clean water messaging and conversations, hosting cleanups and fundraisers, and a monthly rotating Liquid Lecture. The District also supports the annual Pollinator Party in Manitou Springs each year, fishing derby, Scoop the Poop events, biweekly native gardening at the Kathleen Marriage Garden at Sondermann Park, and many other collaborative events. All these programs help to develop “Watershed Warriors,” citizens who understand how our watershed works, their role in, how they can help to do their part to protect and promote our watershed, and that the District is a valuable player in this space.



# Leaving a legacy, securing the future

In the preface of the District's Vision Plan from 2009, then Commissioners Sallie Clark from El Paso County, and Jeff Chostner from Pueblo County said that this District will:

**“...not only...address the major issues of water quantity and quality, but also how to make this stretch of land between Colorado Springs and Pueblo a recreational and educational area that will sustain the Creek.”**

In its short existence, the District has made considerable progress toward that original vision. .

The Board and staff are grateful for the diverse stakeholders who have contributed to the District's success so far, and this work would not have been completed without the valuable partners who have come to the table.

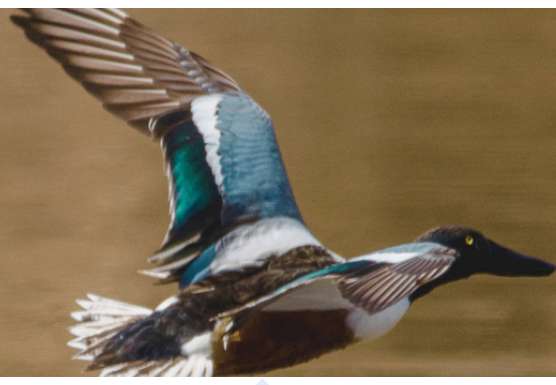
However, this critical and value-adding work is challenging, complex, expensive, and requires buy in from all member governments. There is much more work to do - both on the project side and the public engagement side. There is no more critical issue we are facing than with our water. Between water quality and water quantity, there are many risks and uncertainties. The accomplishments made to date will serve as a foundation for future goals and objectives.



# Sustaining our Communities

Fountain Creek joins the Arkansas River at its confluence near Pueblo and continues on into the Lower Arkansas Valley. This part of our region is notable for the agricultural land that produces a wide variety of fruits, vegetables and meats that can be found on the shelves at our grocery stores and at Farmer's Markets. As a result, the working lands along Fountain Creek and this portion of the Arkansas River are critical to our food supply, economy, and the lifestyles of those that depend on these life-giving waters. The water that flows through our communities has a direct impact on the agriculture and farming operations along the Lower Arkansas Valley. Clean water that is protected from over-sedimentation and erosion is a critical component of food production. The conditions of the watershed in our neighborhoods have a direct impact on farmers' ability downstream to successfully irrigate crops and ensure their product and other agricultural products maintain their high quality while producing the necessary yields to feed our communities.





## **Mission Statement**

**From the 2009 Vision Plan**, the members of the Fountain Creek Vision Task Force came together to turn the Fountain Creek watershed into a regional asset that adds value to our communities. The District's Board, member governments, staff, and volunteers are working to create a healthy waterway with appropriate erosion, sedimentation, and flooding that supports diverse economic, environmental, and recreational interests. They continue to cooperate to enhance and protect Fountain Creek, promoting sustainable use by members of our watershed community and by the visitors we know this wonderful natural amenity will attract.

## **Vision Statement**

Our vision for the Fountain Creek watershed is a strong, resilient, and sustainable ecosystem that supports a variety of interests and activities. Our vision includes a number of issues:

- In terms of water quality, we see a waterway that supports fish and other aquatic species, is safe for recreation, and protects public health.
- Regarding water quantity, we see successful stormwater management to better control flooding and erosion.
- For the larger natural environment, we see healthy, contiguous habitat for a diversity of wildlife species, including the threatened and endangered species that make their homes here. We envision migration corridors into and out of the watershed, allowing species safe and free movement from north to south and from east to west throughout the region.
- With respect to land use planning, we see great opportunities for recreation, including a state park and an integral part of the Front Range Trail. We expect residents and visitors alike to engage in biking, hunting, cycling, fishing, birding, camping, and other activities that foster healthy lifestyles and a greater quality of life. We will continue to respect landowners' rights and envision ongoing opportunities for sustainable agriculture and ranching and responsible growth. We anticipate thoughtful and sustainable development that benefits local economies, supports Ft. Carson, encourages the creation of local jobs, builds neighborhoods and neighbors, and provides green infrastructure and ecosystem services. Throughout the watershed, we envision open space parks and other green areas that connect our residents but separate our cities, allowing each community to create and sustain its own visual and cultural identity.
- Our vision entails achieving all these things for the entire Fountain Creek watershed. However, we acknowledge that doing so might not be possible or practical in every case and that some vision elements may be confined by necessity to Fountain Creek itself.
- Our vision for the work of the Task Force is to model successful collaboration in watershed clean-up and stewardship. We hope to demonstrate that by working together and striking a balance between short-term and long-term thinking, communities can create and realize a shared vision, turn problems into opportunities, and choose their own future. Solutions that benefit different communities, varied species, and different land uses are possible, and working together to find and implement them empowers communities and creates lasting relationships. We know it is our responsibility to educate the public about our work and promote sound community stewardship of the watershed.



# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

**T**he strategic planning process incorporated many layers of feedback from District constituents, community leaders, elected officials, and subject matter experts focused on improving the conditions of the Fountain Creek Watershed and individuals involved in watershed projects across Colorado.

The information collection process relied upon public meetings held in communities throughout the watershed, community surveys that were shared with the public to collect input, as well as a scientific poll that was conducted to better understand the region's beliefs and attitudes towards preserving and protecting the Fountain.

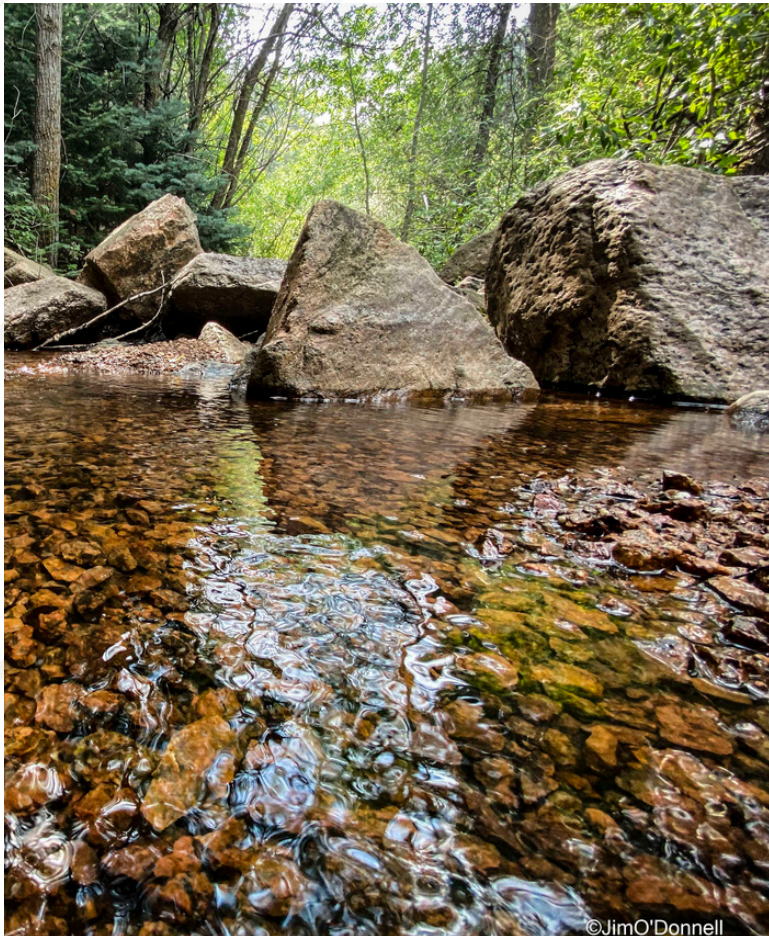
Creek Watershed. Throughout this process, informational meetings were conducted with over fifty stakeholders that included elected officials, community leaders, construction companies, engineering and architecture firms, scientists actively studying the watershed, and staff of other watersheds.

The purpose of these conversations ranged from collecting feedback on the priorities for our Fountain Creek watershed and understanding how the District can best add value to municipalities and other organizations creating projects in the watershed to taking best practices from other water districts to incorporate into programming with the Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and Greenway District. The feedback from these meetings and interviews were key to formulating the goals, priorities, and objectives laid out in the updated strategic plan.



# Strategic Plan Goals

Since its creation, the District has been charged with the fiduciary responsibility of managing the \$50 million provided by Colorado Springs Utilities to offset impacts created by the development of the Southern Delivery System. The founding members intended for the District to be a long-standing organization to foster the future of the watershed and included language in its originating legislation to have the ability to pursue sustainable funding via mil levy authorization from voters. With that in mind, the overarching goals for the updated strategic plan are as follows:



- To understand and select the best option for sustainable funding to carry the District into the future
- To understand all funding opportunities (grants, project partnerships, social-impact programming, etc..) to fully leverage any sustaining dollars the District receives
- Create the necessary infrastructure and plans for the District to successfully scale the size and scope of its work if it does receive sustainable funding from the public
- Identify and build programs that streamline projects and add value to municipalities and organizations completing projects within the watershed
- Grow regional partnerships that encourage deeper collaboration between all municipalities and organizations invested in the future of the watershed
- Bolster the District's brand and name recognition throughout the watershed boundaries by strengthening public communications, marketing, and advocacy efforts throughout the region
- Strengthen the culture of conservation and water quality protection throughout the watershed by demonstrating the value of a healthy watershed to communities through partnerships with school districts, non-profits, and other community facing organizations

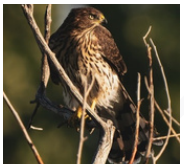
# FUNDING OPTIONS

## ➔ Mil Levy + Project Management



Sustainable funding via a voter approved mil levy with District selecting projects and performing project management

## ➔ Mil Levy + Grant Giving



Sustainable funding via a voter approved mil levy with the District serving as a source of funding without performing project management

## ➔ No Mil Levy + increased gov't share



No sustainable funding via mil levy with jurisdictions increasing their yearly share of funding to the District

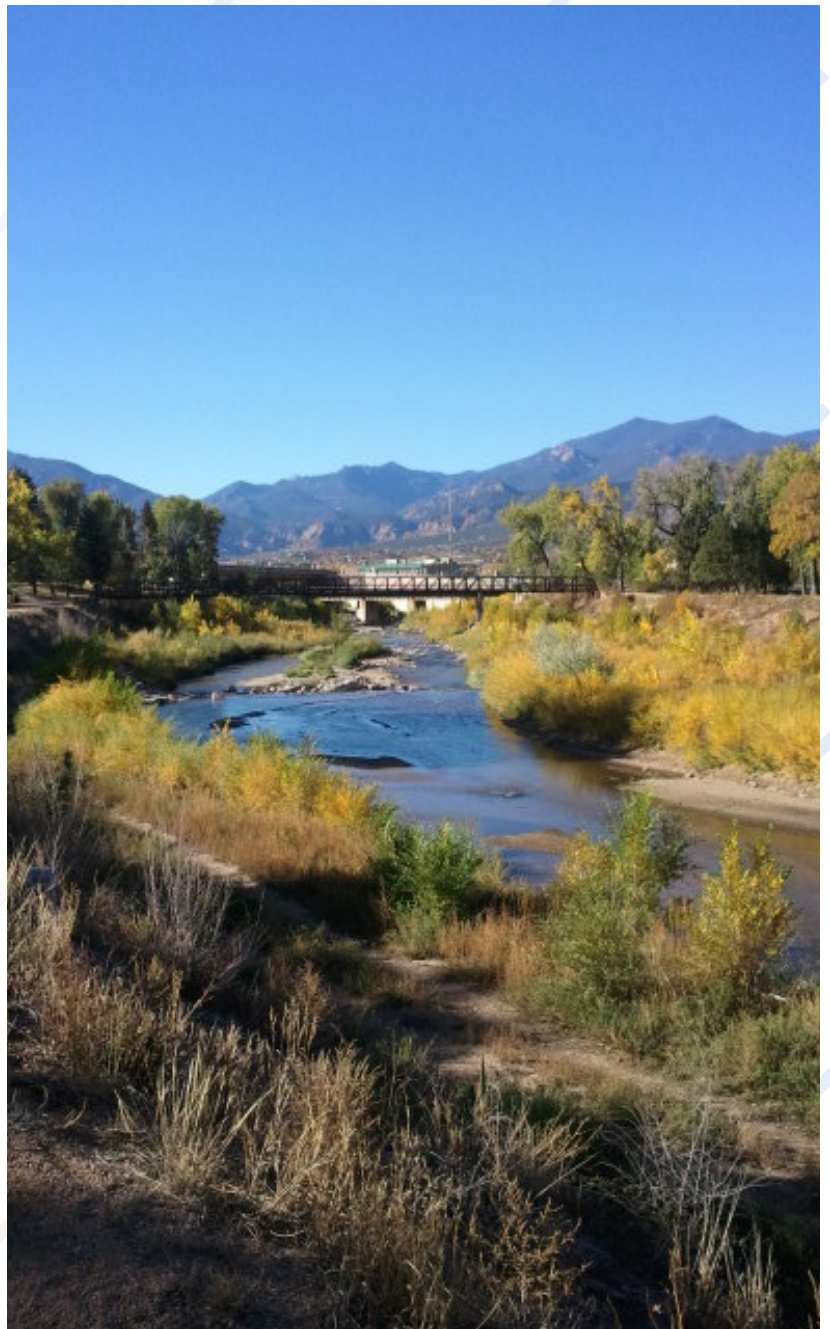
## ➔ No Mil Levy + District work ceases



The District terminates after exhausting the original source of funding

# FUTURE DISTRICT ORGANIZATION OPTIONS

The funding mechanism the District chooses to pursue will have a profound impact on the future of our watershed. The District should consider pursuing a blending of options that provides the flexibility to meet the needs of jurisdictions big and small in the watershed. The following comprises the four options the Board can pursue to sustain the District into the future or terminating its authority after the original \$50 million in funding is exhausted. These solutions can be pursued individually or in tandem:



# Strategic Priorities

## **DEFINITION OF A STRATEGIC PRIORITY**

Strategic priorities are statements or themes which adequately focus the collective efforts of the District to address its purpose and interests. The District has identified the following strategic priorities to be accomplished in the next 3 years:

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**

Identify and secure sustainable funding for the District and fully leverage opportunities for supplemental funding through the many grants and other funding sources available for improving the quality of and conserving waterways

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**

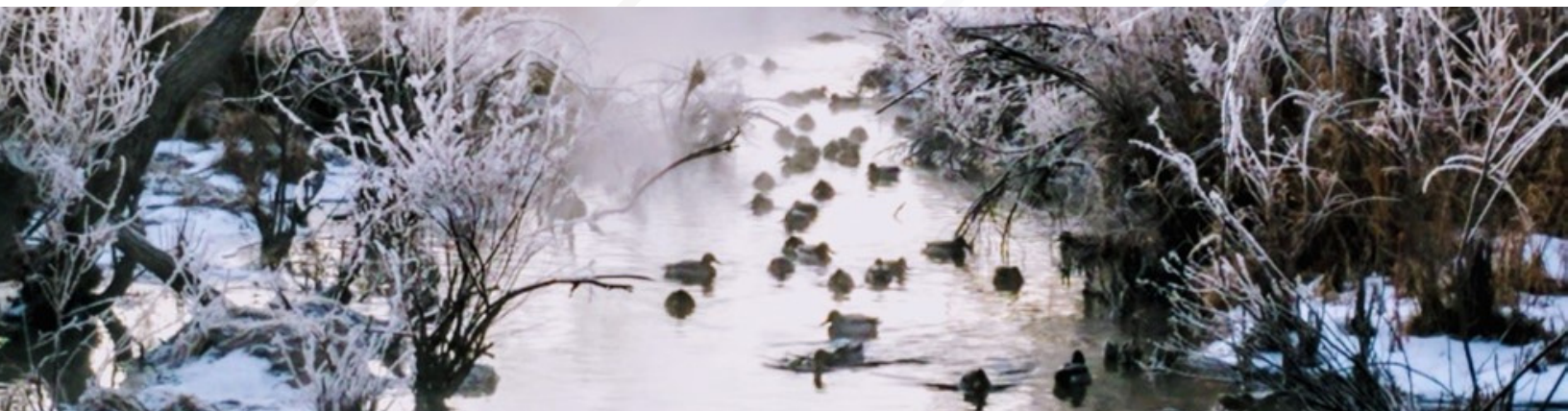
Facilitate stronger intra-jurisdictional collaboration and create programs managed by the Watershed District that allow it to become the regional hub for partnerships and planning for the improvement and conservation of the watershed

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**

Improve name recognition of the District while raising awareness of the watershed and the challenges and opportunities facing our waterways by increasing communications and media engagements, building partnerships with other governments and organizations, and through creating and hosting public events that draw attention to our watershed

### **STRATEGIC PRIORITY:**

Work to build a stronger culture of conservation and preservation of our waterways and natural spaces in the District while elevating the recreational spirit of our region



# Strategic Objectives

## HOW WILL THE DISTRICT ADDRESS ITS PRIORITIES?

In support of its Strategic Objectives, the District has adopted 22 strategic objectives, creating a "To Do" list the District will accomplish by the end of 2025. These objectives are time-based and once completed will contribute to the District achieving its 4 strategic objectives.

## DEFINITION OF A STRATEGIC PRIORITY

Strategic objectives are statements that identify and describe specific actions or activities to be accomplished within a defined timeframe, which aim to achieve a measurable goal that directly supports a specific strategic priority.

## OBJECTIVES

### Supported strategic priority: sustainable funding

Deadline	Objective
Nov 30, 2023	Create and present a public education plan for pursuing the chosen sustainable funding solution
March 31, 2024	Research the four options for sustainable funding for the District and select the best path forward
March 31, 2024	Compile an exhaustive list of all opportunities for grant funding and state/federal dollars to support projects in the district and District operations
August 15, 2024	Present a proposed budget for potential sustainable funding for board review and discussion
October 31, 2024	Create and present to the Board a plan for scaling the infrastructure and staff of the organization to align with the chosen path for sustainable funding for the district



# Strategic Objectives

## Supported strategic priority: Stronger Regional Collaboration

Deadline	Objective
Oct 31, 2023	Start meeting regularly with and build rapport with the USACE, especially decision makers in the Albuquerque office
Dec 31, 2023	Research and provide a recommendation on any changes the District should make to its operating and taxing authority boundaries or pursuing the creation of Special Improvement Districts
March 31, 2024	Work with each jurisdiction in the watershed to compile a masterlist of projects to be completed that includes at least 1 project from each member jurisdiction
May 31, 2024	Research the potential for creating a Development Service Enterprise and present a plan to the board for creating this or a similar program to manage watershed related projects in new and existing developments by May 31, 2024
May 25, 2025	Work with jurisdictions in the watershed to better understand public safety challenges along our waterways and how the District can best partner and support municipalities in improving public safety along our watershed
Dec 31, 2024	Research the potential for securing a Regional General Permit from the USACE and propose a path forward towards securing one for the district

# Strategic Objectives

## Supported strategic priority: Improve Name Recognition

Deadline	Objective
Sept 30, 2023	Create a marketing and communications plan to enhance the district's community outreach and communications
Oct 20, 2023	Provide options for the board to update the district's vision and mission
December 31, 2023	Build relationships with local media that result in at least one story per month in local news about the watershed district
March 31, 2024	Work with local partners who have active projects in the watershed to create signage and other notifications to demonstrate the work being done to improve the watershed
March 31, 2024	Evaluate the benefits of changing the Districts name, either formally through the legislature or informally through other means such as a DBA. If necessary, work with members of the state legislature to pursue updates to the governing legislation of the district to facilitate a name change by the end of the 2024 legislative session
May 31, 2024	Start holding meetings with local, state, and federal officials and partners within the watershed district boundaries
May 31, 2024	Identify a minimum of five local organizations that will benefit from the procurement of a regional general permit or the development services enterprise

# Strategic Objectives

## Supported strategic priority: Stronger Culture of Conservation

Deadline	Objective
Dec 31, 2023	Develop a plan for semiannual regional watershed tours for elected officials, key stakeholders, and members of the media to interface directly with our region's waterways
Dec 31, 2024	Develop a plan for a "state of our watershed" event hosted by the watershed district
July 31, 2025	Research best practices other districts have implemented in partnering with local schools and identify two local school districts to build curriculum and/or opportunities for classrooms to engage in learning and activities around the watershed

## Accountability

The Executive Director will conduct quarterly in-progress reviews with the District's Board of Directors to monitor progress in accomplishment of the Strategic Objectives contained in this strategic plan. On an annual basis the Executive Director will present to the District Board of Directors and the public a report on the implementation of the strategic plan, including updates, observations and recommendations to the Board of Directors to consider.

# Conclusion

The Fountain Creek Watershed Flood Control and Greenway District Strategic Plan is designed to provide a focused and accountable document that creates the foundation for the District going forward. The District is in a time of transition as the original \$50 million that sustained its operations is dedicated to projects in the watershed and must now identify its best alignment to continue serving the residents and communities of the Fountain Creek Watershed. The Strategic Plan is available to download on the District's website at [Fountain-Crk.org](http://Fountain-Crk.org)

The public is encouraged to participate in the evolution of the District. Comments, feedback, and questions are always welcomed and residents are always encouraged to attend the District's monthly board meetings and to actively help with the restoration of our watershed by getting involved in the many community efforts the District organizes to clean up and bring attention to our watershed.

