# Blue River Watershed Source Water Protection Plan Summit County, Colorado

## Prepared by **The Greenlands Reserve** Under a grant from the **Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment**



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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  | 3  |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION   | 5  |
| Protection Plan Process Guidance                         | 5  |
| Public Participation and Steering Committee Organization | 5  |
| Steering Committee and Participants                      | 5  |
| Protection Plan Development Process                      | 6  |
| Purpose of Source Water Protection Plan Development      | 7  |
| OVERVIEW OF COLORADO'S SWAP PROGRAM                      | 7  |
| Source Water Assessment Phase                            | 8  |
| Source Water Protection Phase                            | 9  |
| WATER SUPPLY SETTING                                     | 9  |
| Hydrogeographic and Water Quality Setting                | 9  |
| SOURCE WATER ASSESSMENT RESULTS                          | 10 |
| SOURCE WATER PROTECTION MEASURES                         | 10 |
| Emergency Notification                                   | 11 |
| Emergency Power  | 11 |
| Communication/participation                              | 12 |
| Coordinated Resource Management Model                    | 13 |
| Additional Commitments                                   | 14 |

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Very few public endeavors are more critical to survival of a community than protecting its public water supply. Absent adequate long-term sources of clean water, populations cannot subsist, business cannot function, and the community will not prosper.

We in the Blue River Watershed are fortunate to live in a headwaters locale, with an abundance of clean water that supplies large numbers of users on both sides of the Continental Divide. We do not have large scale industrial, agricultural and commercial operations that can threaten water supplies in other regions. However, we are not exempt from risk. Catastrophic wildfire, changing forest health conditions, leaks, spills, sedimentation, mining activities, urban runoff, and negligent use of chemical products are among the potential threats to our source water. We must address these threats before they become intractable problems. Being proactive, we can coordinate our efforts, save money, and avoid crisis situations.

The purpose of the Blue River Watershed Source Water Protection Plan is to insure the future availability of clean water through adoption of strategies to assist water providers and stakeholders in protecting our water sources. In this regard we have a responsibility, not only to our Summit County community, but also to millions of downstream public water supply users.

The Blue River Watershed essentially defines the boundaries of Summit County. More than thirty water providers serve over 25,000 permanent residents and many more visitors. It is appropriate to develop Source Water Protection Plans for each of these water providers. Where common threats to clean water supplies are identified, it is also appropriate to develop shared strategies to protect source water throughout the watershed, a process that requires cooperation, information sharing and, in some cases, common action among a diverse body of stakeholders.

Process is key to the success of a source water protection effort. Simply producing reports and other documents will not result in increased protection. Water providers and stakeholders must work together to develop and implement actions to protect source water. Accordingly, a Blue River Watershed Source Water Protection Plan Steering Committee was formed to guide a process to develop specific Source Water Protection Plans for the Town of Dillon, the Dillon Valley District, the Snake River Water District and the Town of Kremmling (located in Grand County near the confluence of the Blue River with the Colorado River). The committee worked with the water providers and stakeholders to develop individual plans while at the same time identifying common threats applicable to water providers throughout the Blue River Watershed. A protection plan was completed for The Snake River Water District but the SRWD elected to not finalize and implement their plan at this time. This report identifies those common risks and the tools that are available to mitigate the risks.

The Steering Committee reviewed multiple source water risk management approaches capable of implementation. Clear from the beginning was that the most significant threats to clean source water in our region were not from specific pollutants or point sources, but rather came from systemic practices related to an ability to act quickly, efficiently, and effectively to mitigate potential threats.

Communication, coordination, education, and capacity were identified as key components in successfully addressing source water risks.

From a list of possible approaches, specific recommendations addressed situations most likely to threaten source water supply, which included the development of Best Management Practices. These BMP's took the form of checklists specific to each of the four water providers. These checklists were not designed to be mandatory, but rather as recommendations to guide a thought process addressing potential threats. For other risks, including those associated with forest and natural resource impacts, the concept of a coordinated resource management model was introduced. As a first step, a site-specific model was completed for the Straight Creek source water protection area that would be applicable for other source water protection areas.

Four threat categories were identified, and specific tools (strategies) developed:

- <u>Emergency notification</u>
- Emergency power and water supply capacity
- <u>Coordination/participation</u>
- Forest and resource management

Cost estimates have been developed for the four specific Source Water Protection Plans. Other water providers should develop their own Source Water Protection Plans and their own cost estimates. Many, if not most, of the recommended actions are not expensive. Those that involve greater expense, including emergency power capability, may best be handled at a county level, where costs can be shared and grants obtained.

The three water providers finally included in this plan have all agreed to keep their customers informed of their actions to protect their source water. As other water providers develop their own specific plans, they also should keep their customers aware of activities to protect their source water.

## Introduction

#### **Protection Plan Process Guidance**

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment established the Blue River Watershed source water protection planning process. It began with the review of the source water assessment plans that were developed in 2004. In this case, plans for the Town of Dillon, the Town of Kremmling, the Dillon Valley District and the Snake River Water District received a thorough review. Subsequently, a public meeting that included with a wide cross section of water interests in the county established, a Steering Committee to guide the planning process. Regular meetings of the Steering Committee along with interim staff work resulted in the creation of plans for each of the four cooperating water providers. From that work and a subsequent public meeting, an overall assessment protocol is now available for other water providers interested in protecting source water in the Blue River watershed.

#### Public Participation and Steering Committee Organization

Public and stakeholder participation are key to the overall success of Colorado's SWAP program. The program was founded on the concept that informed citizens, equipped with fundamental knowledge about their drinking water sources and associated threats, are the most effective advocates for protecting this critical resource. The state successfully used voluntary citizen advisory groups in the development of both the wellhead protection and source water assessment and protection program plans. Accordingly, the first step for the Blue River Watershed process involved a public meeting attended by a diverse group of citizens and stakeholders concerned with water protection in the county.

#### **Steering Committee and Participants**

Following the public meeting, a Steering Committee was formed to guide the source water protection planning process. The table below identifies the members of the Blue River Watershed Source Water Protection Plan Steering Committee.

| Name          | Role/Responsibility | Title                | Affiliation                |
|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Steve Swanson | Watershed group     | Executive Director   | Blue River Watershed Group |
| Todd Anderson | Power supplier      | Area Manager         | Xcel Energy                |
| Joel Cochran  | Emergency Services  | Emergency Manager    | SC Sheriffs Office         |
| Trevor Giles  | Water supplier      | Chief Plant Operator | Town of Dillon             |
| Doug Moses    | Water supplier      | Water Director       | Town of Kremmling          |
| Dave Morris   | Water supplier      | Superintendent       | Snake River Water District |

#### **Steering Committee**

| Chic Koran      | Water supplier    | President        | Dillon Valley District Board |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------------------|
| Justin Anderson | Forest Service    | Hydrologist      | U.S. Forest Service          |
| Dan Hendershott | County Government | Manager          | SC Environmental Health      |
| John Duggan     | Coordination      | SWAP Coordinator | CDPHE                        |

#### **Other Participants**

The source water protection planning process attracted interest and participation from other key stakeholders. Input by these entities was instrumental in developing the source water protection plan Participants included:

Gary Roberts - Town of Breckenridge Water Department Tom Dougherty – Town of Breckenridge Engineering Holly Huyck - Colorado Department of Transportation John Hagan – Blue River Watershed Group Brian Lorch – Summit County Open Space and Trails Zach Margolis - Town of Silverthorne Water Department Dave Koop - Mayor, Town of Silverthorne Jean Kiehm – Vail Resorts Frank Papandrea - Keystone Resort Eric Howell - Colorado Springs Utilities Christiane Hinterman – Friends of the Dillon Ranger District Captain John Lupton – Colorado State Patrol John Trentini – Colorado State Patrol Paul Semmer – US Forest Service Jack Benson – Summit County Dispatch Matt Willitts - Water Solutions, Inc. Kelly Greene – Lake Dillon Fire Rescue Sandy Briggs – Forest Health Task Force

## **Protection Plan Development Process**

The source water protection planning effort consisted of a structured process of working group meetings followed by public meetings. Steering Committee recommendations were developed from working group meetings convened to evaluate source water assessment conclusions, more fully identify risks, establish goals and objectives for the protection plans, establish protection priorities, and analyze source water management approaches. Ultimately, the Blue River Watershed Source Water Protection Plan Steering Committee's recommendations for the four water providers were incorporated into draft source water protection plans and presented at a public meeting for comment and discussion.

#### **Public Meetings**

| Date       | Location                                  | Purpose / Description   |
|------------|---|---|
| 23/11/2009 | Summit County Commons                     | Meeting to Discuss Issues Associated with Source<br>Water Protection Plan |
| 17/6/2010  | Summit County Community and Senior Center | Meeting to Discuss Draft Source Water Protection<br>Plan                  |

The general public was notified of the public meeting schedule, location, dates and times through notices in the Summit Daily News prior to each meeting. Meeting notifications also were made via the Our Future Summit email list to more than 800 interested citizens and community leaders. An invitation to attend and participate in these public meetings was extended to community members and the public at large, some 20 specific stakeholders and to residents of unincorporated Summit County.

Following the development of plans for the four specific water provider systems, key components of each system were analyzed to see what elements of that source water protection plan might be applicable either to other specific systems in Summit County or to systems throughout the State. This analysis has led to the development of source water protection plan water provider guidelines.

#### Purpose of Source Water Protection Plan Development

An ample supply of clean source water is critical to the long term prosperity of communities throughout the Blue River Watershed. Significant risks exist for any community related to the potential contamination or rationing of its water supply. The primary reason for developing and implementing source water management approaches is to apply an additional level of protection to the drinking water supply. Preventive measures at the local level (i.e., county and municipal level) aid in the protection of the source water and will complement existing regulatory protection measures implemented at state and federal governmental levels.

Our county-wide source water protection plan does not specifically identify source water protection areas. Rather, it establishes strategies that are appropriate for the Snake River Water District, Dillon, Dillon Valley and Kremmling and are believed to be appropriate for other water providers in Summit County. These strategies were developed for the four systems by starting with their source water assessments and working out best management practices through the steering committee process.

## **OVERVIEW OF COLORADO'S SWAP PROGRAM**

Source water assessment and protection came into existence in 1996 as a result of Congressional reauthorization of and amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act. The 1996 amendments required each state to develop a source water assessment and protection (SWAP) program. The Water Quality Control Division, an agency of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, assumed the

responsibility of developing Colorado's SWAP program. The SWAP program protection plan will be integrated with the existing Colorado Wellhead Protection Program that was codified through amendments made to the federal Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA, Section 1428) in 1986. Wellhead protection is a preventative concept that aims to protect public groundwater wells from contamination. The Wellhead Protection Program and the SWAP program have similar goals and will combine protection efforts in one merged program plan.

Colorado's SWAP program is an iterative, two-phased process (Figure 1) designed to assist public water systems in preventing potential contamination of their untreated drinking water supplies. The two phases include the Assessment Phase and the Protection Phase as depicted in the upper and lower portions of Figure 1, respectively.



Figure 1. Source Water Assessment and Protection Process.

#### Source Water Assessment Phase

As depicted in the upper portion of Figure 1, the Assessment Phase for all public water systems consists of four primary elements.

- 1. Delineating the source water assessment area for each drinking water source;
- 2. Conducting a contaminant source inventory to identify potential sources of contamination within each of the source water assessment areas;

- 3. Conducting a susceptibility analysis to determine the potential susceptibility of each public drinking water source to the different sources of contamination and;
- 4. Reporting the results of the source water assessment to the public water systems and the general public.

The Assessment Phase involves understanding where source water comes from, what contaminant sources and events potentially threaten the water supply, and how susceptible each water source is to potential contamination or disturbance. The susceptibility of a discrete water source is determined by examining the properties of its physical setting and potential contaminant source threats. The resulting analysis is used to determine how susceptible each water source is. This work was previously completed for all Summit County systems, marking the starting point for the four source water protection plans developed through this project.

#### Source Water Protection Phase

The Protection Phase is a voluntary ongoing process, whereby a water provider evaluates source water hazards and employs preventative measures to protect its water supply. Adequate protective measures can prevent unnecessary treatment or replacement costs associated with a contaminated water supply. As with the assessment phase, the development of a source water protection plan involves a public process. The development of a specific plan for a water provider consists of four primary elements.

- 1. Involving local stakeholders in the planning process;
- 2. Developing a comprehensive protection plan for all drinking water sources;
- 3. Implementing a protection plan on a ongoing basis to reduce the risk of potential contamination or disturbance of the drinking water sources; and
- 4. Monitoring the effectiveness of the protection plan and updating it accordingly as future assessment results indicate.

The process was so initiated for our four water providers. This overview report uses the information collected and the benefits of discussion regarding the development of the four discrete plans to present information relevant for water providers throughout the Blue River Watershed. It is our intent that this report encourages other water providers in the Blue River watershed to establish source water protection plans for their own systems.

## WATER SUPPLY SETTING

#### Hydrogeographic and Water Quality Setting

The Blue River is a tributary of the Colorado River. The three main streams of the Blue River watershed are the Blue River, the Snake River and Ten Mile Creek, which empty into the Dillon Reservoir. Although smaller in volume, Staight Creek is the primary water supply for Dillon and Dillon Valley. Over thirty independent water providers operate within the Blue River Watershed involving a combination of surface water and ground water systems. In addition, Dillon Reservoir is a critical water storage facility operated by the Denver Water Board. Most of treatment systems are relatively simple, generally involving only filtration and chlorination.

Summit County comprises one of the headwater areas of the Colorado River, meaning most water systems have clean source water. However, these systems now face the impacts of a mountain pine beetle epidemic that has produced an increased risk of catastrophic wildfire and degradation of forest health. Other potential threats come from roads and paved surfaces that involve sediment loading into streams, chemical disbursement from routine highway operations, and spill events which can impact both surface and ground source water.

Summit County has been growing rapidly over that last 20 years and, despite the recession of 2008-2009, growth is expected to continue over the next 20 years. While growth, in and of itself, is not a threat to source water, increased population brings increased risks from activities associated with growth. For example there is greater risk of increases in surface runoff, underground storage tank contamination, septic and sewage system leakage, lawn chemicals, tree and weed spraying, and road and parking lot related contamination. These threats can be substantially mitigated through wise planning and design. Since much of the county is under the stewardship of the U.S. Forest Service, we expect continued development pressure on the small amount of private land available. Increased recreational use of Forest Service land also puts additional pressure on source water protection areas because recreational use can create erosion and sediment loading into streams along with petroleum hydrocarbon and other chemical contamination. Historic mining activities have resulted in heavy metal and other mineral contamination that compromises source water quality for a number of areas in the county. Large-scale mining operations continue to be planned at the Climax (molybdenum) Mine where managers have taken extensive engineering measures to minimize impact on source water. It is critical that these measures continue.

## SOURCE WATER ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The Colorado Department of Public and Health and Environment assumed the lead role in conducting the source water assessments for the public water systems in Colorado. Most of the water providers in Summit County received their assessment reports in 2004. Most Summit County assessments received showed relatively few current problems. This reflects present conditions which result from the rural, recreational nature of Summit County's economy. Ground water systems in some cases face risks from underground storage tanks or dry cleaning establishments. Surface water systems generally have source water from forested areas. While septic systems are of some concern, most of the county's population is served by sewer systems and excellent waste water treatment facilities. The greatest concern identified by the Steering Committee involved transportation corridors. Summit County is traversed east-west by I-70 and has a relatively major state highway crossing the county north to south. Potential spills from highway accidents are frequently identified as a potential problem. Past mining activity in the county has left several streams contaminated by heavy metals from acid mine drainage from leaking adits.

## SOURCE WATER PROTECTION MEASURES

In general, each water provider has a specific source water protection area. For a surface system, that may include the entire watershed of a small stream. For a ground water system, it may involve an area around a well and the recharge area supplying that well. The process of developing a source water protection plan calls for the source water area to be well defined and for possible contaminants to be identified. This was done for the four water providers for which specific plans were developed.

In the four source water areas studied, the primary issue categories currently threatening source water are:

- 1. Emergency notification
- 2. Emergency power and water supply
- 3. Communication/participation

4. Forest and natural resource impacts on water quality

Generally water providers throughout the Blue River Watershed are faced with issues of these types. These issues will be addressed separately by each water provider as they look to protect their source water.

#### Emergency notification

For many, if not most, water providers, one of the most significant source water protection issues relates to hazardous material spills. Timely notification of a spill to an affected water provider is critical. Most emergency notification is initiated through a 911 call. Depending on the type of road and its location, the incident commander may be the Colorado State Patrol, the Summit County Sheriff, or a local police department. While current law mandates a number of notifications, not all of these notifications are timely. Therefore, it is critical that Summit County Dispatch, the entity that receives all local 911 calls, has the correct information and notification procedures to make sure the water provider is notified quickly. For example, the source water protection plan for the Town of Dillon specifies their need for immediate notification should a spill occur on Interstate 70 in the vicinity of mile marker 208 since such a spill can enter their water intake structure in minutes. The same is true for the Dillon Valley District, which shares an intake structures with the Town of Dillon. While other systems may or may not need such immediate notification, almost all require timely notification of a spill in their source water protection area. To assist in this effort, we have prepared a new summary sheet for Summit County Dispatch, to assist them in determining which water provider to notify in the event of a spill on various county transportation corridors. Through Summit County Dispatch and other local emergency personnel participation in the source water protection process, responders better appreciate the need for prompt water provider notification, as the loss of water supply can become a disaster unto itself.

Similarly, each system needs to have procedures in place to notify their customers of a problem with their water supply. These procedures need to be thought out before a problem and be in place for immediate response.

To help address specific strategies to improve notification procedures, a Best Management Practice checklist was developed for the four water providers studied in this effort. One example is a "reference guide", which is a one page summary of each system, appropriate emergency contacts and description of the source water area, including a map, which can be provided to emergency responders. The guide was developed for each provider and the checklist suggests that they distribute the guide to relevant emergency providers.

BMPs for emergency notification seek to achieve the following goals:

- Create water provider notification lists
- Provide water system characteristics to local emergency responders
- Provide updated lists of key emergency and stakeholder contacts to water providers
- Educate emergency agencies on the importance of protecting source waters
- Educate water providers on the importance of understanding characteristics of spilled petroleum hydrocarbons or chemicals

#### *Emergency power and water supply capacity*

Emergency power is important to assure a continuous water supply. For ground water systems, power is needed to pump water to the surface. For most surface water systems, pumping is needed to transport

water to a treatment facility and/or to storage tanks, or to operate a treatment facility. In Summit County the possibility of catastrophic wildfire impacting electrical supply for extended periods of time strongly suggests that water providers should reassess their need for emergency power backup. Our recommendation is that multiple water providers might benefit from a cooperative review of emergency power capability as well as sharing the cost of an emergency generator. Countywide planning might allow for cost sharing among multiple systems and create the possibility of accessing state or federal funds. Water providers might also want to address the issue of water storage capacity to address extended power outages and/or wildfire fighting efforts. BMPs for Emergency power and water supply capacity focus on the following goals:

- Protect power lines
- Protect infrastructure and infrastructure access
- Determine need for backup generators
- Improve power and water sharing during emergencies
- Protect access to water supply infrastructure
- Analyze water usage under emergency conditions
- Analyze storage and supply capacity under emergency conditions

#### Communication/participation

Water providers are committed to providing clean water in a reliable manner. A principle of source water protection is to become more involved with potential threats before they become problems. Our plan recommends that water providers engage with the U.S. Forest Service, the Summit County Planning Department, the Colorado Department of Transportation, Xcel Energy, homeowners associations, resorts, landowners, property managers, and other stakeholders to mitigate potential threats to source water. This report also recommends that these stakeholders actively inform water providers about any plans in or around source water protection areas so appropriate precautions can be taken.

The Snake River Water District provides one example. While no significant threat exists from the underground fuel storage tanks that Keystone Resort has placed at each lift on the south side of the river, the SRWD does take water from the alluvium on the north side of the river. Therefore, new tanks on the north side of the river, particularly those installed near either well field, could pose a threat to the underground water supply. Despite significant advances in underground storage tank technology and monitoring, all underground installations have leak potential. Effective source water protection planning includes timely water provider involvement with resorts and developers to assure new underground storage tank installations are not located up gradient of well fields.

Ski resorts construct and maintain large parking lots for customers. These require designs that prevent contaminated surface water from draining into areas around or over well fields. Water providers should make sure they are involved at the planning stage to insure that source water protection is part of the resort facility planning process. Ski areas need to reciprocate, allowing the formation of a meaningful partnership with water providers that they may impact.

Land management activities often occur in or around source water protection areas. In Summit County, much of that activity is under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Forest Service. The agency has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Colorado Department of Environment and Public Service to make source water protection a priority. Even so, it remains the responsibility of each water provider to make sure the Forest Service is aware of the boundaries of source water protection areas. Likewise, the county, area and town planning departments should receive information about source water protection areas and issues.

Another issue concerns chemical applications to protect trees and destroy noxious weeds. While most commonly used chemicals pose little risk to source water areas, the possibility still exists. Source water protection involves water providers paying attention to spraying activities in their source water protection areas. Tree and weed spraying operators need to know where source water protection areas are so they can adjust their activities accordingly. This is important for water providers with surface or ground water sources. This is another good example of where prevention is much more effective than later cleanup. Best Management Practices include such activities like becoming familiar with tree and weed sprayers in a water provider's area, meeting with homeowner associations and property managers in their source water protection areas to make them aware of source water areas, and working with these groups over time to develop appropriate concerns and practices within the source water protection area. Water providers such become knowledgeable about the characteristics of lawn chemicals, tree spray chemicals and weed killing chemicals being regularly applied in their source water protection zones.

Another opportunity concerns public education. Some of the very best partners for water systems in protecting their source water are their customers. Part of any source water protection plan is to establish a campaign to educate customers and the general public about source water protection. Once again, Best Management Practices checklists have been developed for a variety of communication and participation activities.

BMPs for public and stakeholder outreach seek to meet these goals:

- Promote highway designs to better mitigate spills and decrease sediment
- · Coordinate with railroads to better mitigate potential spill impacts on water systems
- Educate developers, U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service, land owners, highway departments, government planning agencies and other stakeholders about potential impacts to source water areas
- Coordinate with homeowners associations, landowners, and governmental agencies to mitigate impacts from tree and weed spraying, chemical spills, surface water drainage, storage tank leaks and other threats to source water supply systems

#### **Coordinated Resource Management Models**

A Coordinated Resource Management Model is a tool that benefits both water providers and forest resource managers, providing a structure to coordinate efforts to optimize results within source water protection areas. A Coordinated Resource Management Model defines watershed protection, fire mitigation, and forest restoration as common goals shared by local water providers, government agencies, and interested stakeholders. The plan establishes mechanisms to share information and design actions and outcomes that meet the needs of local water providers, stakeholders and communities.

Over the past five years, several large landscape scale plans have been prepared to better protect forest lands and watersheds from the impacts of catastrophic wildfire in Summit County. This work has been prompted by a mountain pine beetle epidemic that has significantly increased the threat from catastrophic wildfire and therefore our ability to protect source water. Of particular importance in Summit County are the following:

Summit County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (SCCWPP), which prioritizes areas throughout the county for needed fuels treatments based on potential damage to life and property from wildfire.

The Blue River Watershed Assessment (2009) evaluated hazards to water supplies and set treatment priorities for critical watersheds to address wildfire threats.

Recently a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the U.S. Forest Service and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) committing both agencies to work together to protect watersheds. This document should be viewed as a basis for subsequent agreements between the U.S. Forest Service and local communities and water providers to protect public watershed resources on National Forest System lands. The MOU designates CDPHE-delineated Source Water Areas as "Municipal Supply Watersheds".

The purpose of a Coordinated Resource Management Model is to build on work that has already been done in large-scale efforts, by providing a structure for coordinated resource management of small-scale watersheds. The intent is to better coordinate stakeholder actions in a watershed to achieve the goals of the SCCWPP, the Blue River Watershed Assessment, and the MOU, while protecting specific source water areas.

Time, money and effort are optimized once all stakeholders know what others are doing to remove trees, create sediment basins, monitor stream quality and conduct other efforts to promote forest health, prevent catastrophic wildfire and improve water quality.

A Coordinated Resource Management Model was developed for Straight Creek in the Dillon and Dillon Valley Source Water Protection Plans. Other water providers will likely find that use of this tool can improve their source water protection efforts.

## Additional Commitments

A Source Water Protection Plan should identify an ongoing commitment to source water protection. All plans developed in this project include a commitment to keep customers informed of their source water protection efforts. In addition, they commit to applying source water protection principles to site and protect new water sources. Other water providers in Summit County should consider similar commitments.

Specific Source Water Protection Plans are not included with this copy of the report. For more information on each specific plan, please contact the water provider.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A Town of Dillon, CO Source Water Protection Plan
Appendix B Dillon Valley District Source Water Protection Plan
Appendix C Draft Snake River Water District Source Water Protection Plan
Appendix D Town of Kremmling, CO Source Water Protection Plan
Appendix E Straight Creek Resource Management Model