



# ANNUAL REPORT 2020



# FROM OUR CEO

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It hardly seems real that I started with CUSP not much more than a year ago. It is no exaggeration that 2020 came as a surprise to us all, but CUSP still managed to get important work done without the support of many of our dedicated and hardworking volunteers, with work projects limited by COVID safety protocols.

The CUSP community is engaged and active, and without you we couldn't have accomplished all that we did together. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic I haven't been able to meet the people I wanted or even needed to meet. Along with all of you, CUSP will be happy when we move past "these trying times" and "unprecedented era."

With this report, we not only look back on what we've accomplished, but also look forward to all the great work we can get done in 2021.



**JOHN GEERDES**

Executive Director

## *Our Mission*

THE COALITION FOR THE UPPER SOUTH PLATTE (CUSP) SEEKS TO PROTECT THE WATER QUALITY AND ECOLOGICAL HEALTH OF THE UPPER SOUTH PLATTE WATERSHED, THROUGH THE COOPERATIVE EFFORTS OF WATERSHED STAKEHOLDERS, WITH EMPHASIS PLACED ON COMMUNITY VALUES AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY.

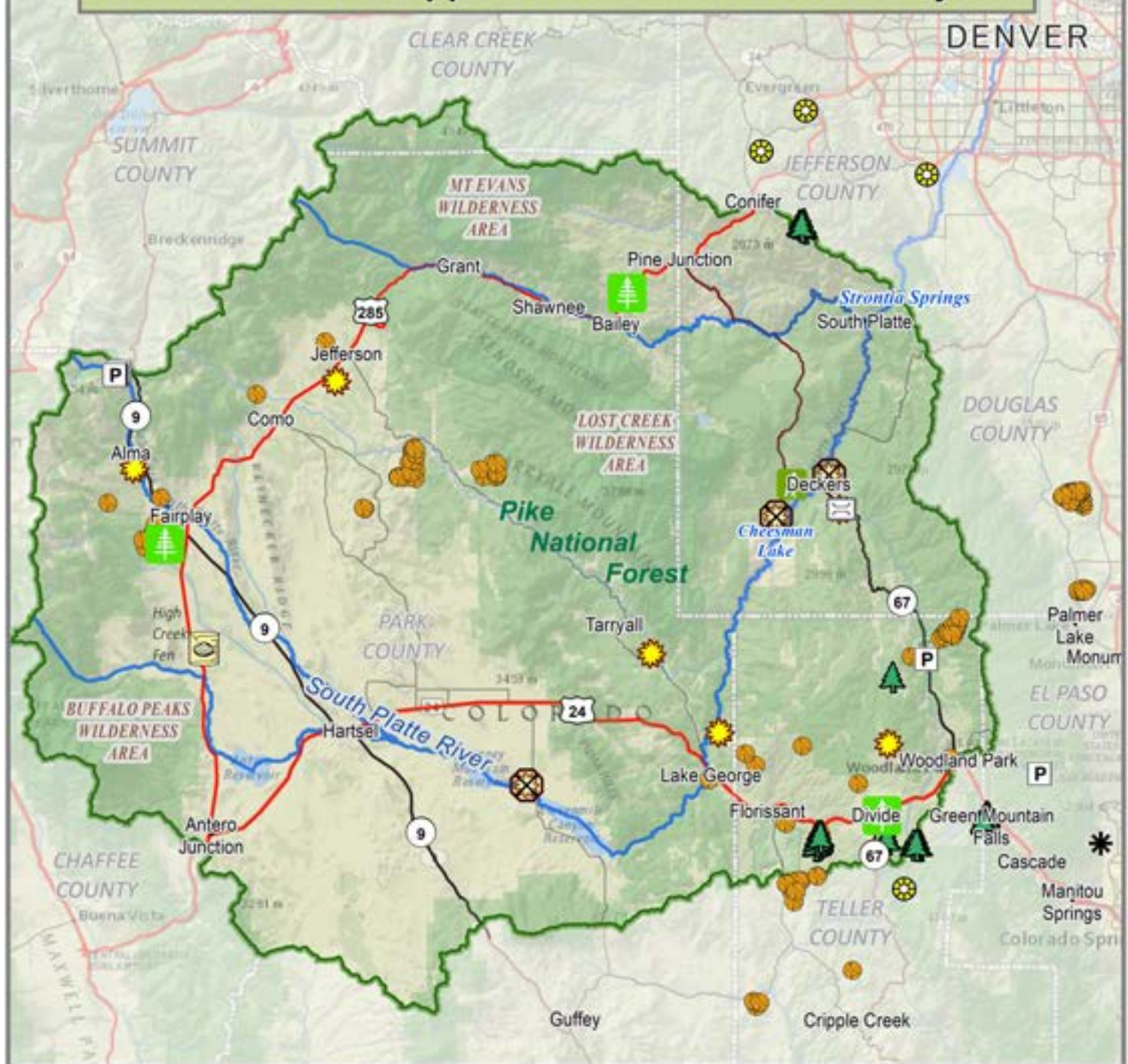
## *Our Vision*

A HEALTHY WATERSHED



NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

# Coalition for the Upper South Platte - 2020 Projects



Forestry



Chipping



Trail Work



Bridge, Horse Creek



Biological Monitoring



Road Signs, Parking Improvements



Tree Planting, Waldo Burn Scar



Noxious Weed Mitigation



Boot Brush Kiosks



Slash Sites (seasonal)



Mushroom Project Sites



# WATER QUALITY

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In 2020, CUSP completed the contract for Hayman Fire (2002) recovery projects. The Horse Creek Bridge was installed to provide access to private property from Highway 67.

The new bridge replaces outdated culverts, and will be able to withstand high water through the area without washing away.

This also continues to reduce sediment in Horse Creek, improving habitat and resiliency.



## *Planning for 2021 projects*

Initiated agreement with Denver Water on Strontia Springs Watershed Plan, to understand continuing sources of sediment transported into the river and reservoir from historic fires in the watershed.



Park County Commissioners approved Land and Water Trust Fund Grant to plan river restoration work on the South Platte River in the Lake George area, to improve aquatic species passage, increase bank stabilization, reduce sediment and enhance overall habitat.

# FOREST HEALTH

CUSP continued our work for forest health in the region. We did not have a summer field crew, nor large volunteer groups, but dedicated contractors worked hand in hand with our foresters to address forest health and pre-fire mitigation issues. This work is important to improve the resiliency of the forest against insect, disease, drought, and catastrophic wildfire.

The neighborhood fuels reduction program had another successful season partnering with property owners bringing the chipper to their neighborhood to address mitigation on their properties, for 28 days, chipping slash on 98 properties, impacting over 95 acres in Teller, Park, and Jefferson Counties.

The slash sites in Divide, Fairplay, and Bailey operated on an abbreviated season due to COVID. The sites continue to be a vital community resource. With some moisture, CUSP will use the air curtain burner to dispose of the accumulated slash in Divide.

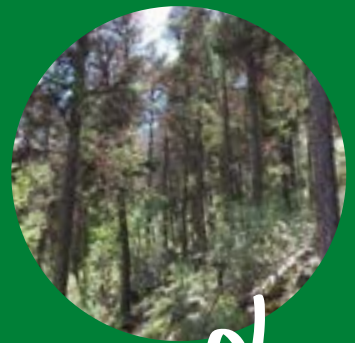
## *Green Mountain Falls, El Paso County*

Mt. Dewey Open Space  
6.6 acres of Gambel Oak thinning with  
State Wildland Inmate Fire Team (SWIFT).



SWIFT Crew fuel break  
1.2 acres on Thomas Trail area heavily  
impacted by dwarf mistletoe  
infestation, additional work to be  
completed in 2021, with the goal to  
complete a fuel break around  
residential areas.

Two acres of defensible space  
work on 10 properties, also  
impacted by dwarf mistletoe.

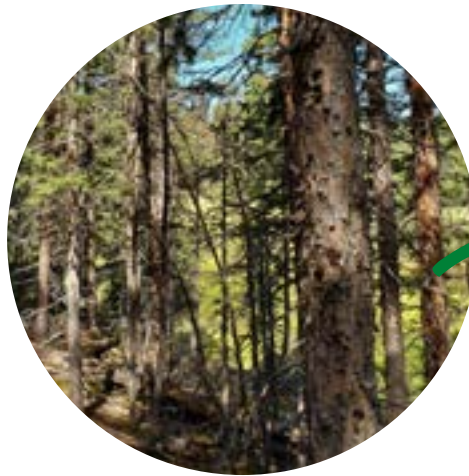




# FOREST HEALTH

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CUSP completed 40 acres of mitigation treatments on Teller County's Catamount Ranch Open Space. The project removed hazard trees along popular trails and additional work in the forest to increase forest health and sustainability. An additional 50 acres will be treated in 2021.



## *Slash Removal*

CUSP contracted to bring our air curtain destructor to Conifer, Jefferson County, to eliminate burn piles from a forest treatment project. The ACD usually lives at our slash site in Divide.

In partnership with the Jefferson County Conservation District and The Nature Conservancy, CUSP burned piles until COVID stopped progress.

Ultimately, the remaining piles were chipped and hauled to a biomass yard. 197 piles were processed from treatment of 72 acres.



# COMMUNITY IN ACTION

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The 2018 Arabian Acres Community Wildfire Protection Plan recognized:

*"In the event of a wildfire, travel into, out of and within Arabian Acres would be hazardous. The evacuation routes all have potential hazards. During a wildfire, evacuation by residents or access by firefighters could be locked."*

CUSP partnered with Arabian Acres, Colorado State Forest Service and the Teller County Office of Emergency Management to mitigate hazard trees on County Roads adjoining 16 properties to enhance egress routes in the subdivision. CUSP also completed Home Ignition Zone inspections for 50 properties in Arabian Acres, giving owners recommendations to increase their resilience in the event of a wildfire.

CUSP looks forward to working with other communities on evacuation routes in 2021, beginning with Bailey in Park County.

CSFS CO-WRAP  
Wildfire Risk



# INNOVATION

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The CUSP study on the efficacy of using native wood rotting mushrooms to break down wood chips continued in 2020.

In partnership with US Forest Service, several piles of slash left from a timber operation were treated with mushroom spawn. Preliminary results show the mushrooms happily doing their jobs to rot the wood.

CUSP also worked with Denver Botanic Gardens at Chatfield Farms to address Cottonwood tree chips from the expansion of the reservoir. It would appear that the mushrooms like Cottonwood just as much as our usual conifers.

For 2021, we look forward to a large mushroom inoculation on private land funded by property owners.



# FIRE RECOVERY

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CUSP has learned and experienced the fact that wildfire recovery isn't a sprint, but rather a marathon. The Weston Pass fire started in Park County in 2018. Each year since, CUSP and our partners at the US Forest Service have worked to stabilize the area and mitigate post-fire impacts.

Seeding efforts for Weston Pass burn area in 2019 did not achieve the desired results, so Plan B will be the use of seed balls in 2021. Approximately 16,000 seed balls will be distributed over 4 1/2 acres in the burn area.

Seeding will be undertaken in the spring, hopefully right before a big snow!



## *Seed Balls?*

Sort of self explanatory, but the details are CUSP's native seed mix wrapped in soil, clay, and compost then dried.

The goal is to give the seeds the opportunity to germinate before they are eaten by wildlife or dry out and are unable to establish.

Seed balls may have been used by Ancient Egyptians to seed the banks of the Nile after seasonal floods. They were used extensively to help improve food production in post WWII Japan.



# TRUMBULL TRAIL



The Trumbull Trail is located north of Deckers, on HWY 67. The trail was constructed and interpretive signs installed several years ago. Over time the trail condition had declined, in many places the trail was difficult to locate and the signage had faded.

The trail is a unique opportunity to share information about the forest, wildlife, wildfire, and the importance of the area for front range water providers.

2020

14 old signs and 11 posts removed  
5 unsafe steps removed, 6 new steps installed  
7 updated metal frame signs installed



2021

Install erosion control demonstrations:  
jute matting and log erosion barriers

## *Boot Brushes Stop Invasive Weeds in Your Tracks*

CUSP installed three boot brush kiosks for hikers, fisherman, and site users to clean their shoes.

### Why Boot Brushes?

Shoes, clothing, equipment, and animals might be carrying seeds of noxious weeds. That's how the little hitchhikers get around, they take a ride and spread to new areas.

Pay attention to your equipment and look for the boot brushes at:

Trumbull Interpretive Trail  
Upper Cheesman Canyon Trail  
Dream Stream



# PARTNERSHIPS

CUSP completed several maintenance projects designed to sustain heavily used USFS sites. Installed parking barriers and parking control signs at Montgomery Reservoir at Hoosier Pass, Park County, to control parking and traffic flow in an area with limited space. Oversaw seal coat and parking lot striping at Rampart Reservoir, El Paso County, and restriping at Manitou Lake, Teller County.



Knocked down  
by a trailer?

## High Creek Fen Monitoring



Continuing our long-term partnership with South Park National Heritage area and Park County Middle School, students completed monitoring at the High Creek Fen, Park County.

## Sign Replacement



Our long time partner, CCTU will be working with CUSP to replace two interpretive signs in the riparian environment to provide information to users of the area.



# MOVING AHEAD

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There are always irons in the fire, projects being planned, a grant (or six) in the works. 2021 is no different.

We'll be coordinating with Fire Adapted Bailey and Jefferson County to clear hazard trees from road rights-of-way. Private property owners in Conifer have contracted for forest health projects to enhance their fire resiliency.

CUSP is very excited about current planning for a river restoration project on three miles of river west of Lake George, Park County.

The USFS will complete the NEPA review for the Lower Eleven Mile/ Lake George diversion structure removal in 2021. Then we begin permitting and fundraising process for that project.

## *Trails in 2021*

Gill Trail and Upper Cheesman Canyon Trail in Jefferson County have been ongoing projects for CUSP trail crews.

In 2021, we hope to have funding to bring in the big guns and have a contractor re-route and improve a particularly erosion prone section of the trail.

We're happy to have our partners Cutthroat Chapter of Trout Unlimited on board for this project!



CUSP will partner with Eleven Mile State Park and the South Park Natural Heritage Area for improvements to the Corral Cove Backcountry Trail.

The trail is currently impacted by water from the reservoir and often is unsafe to use.

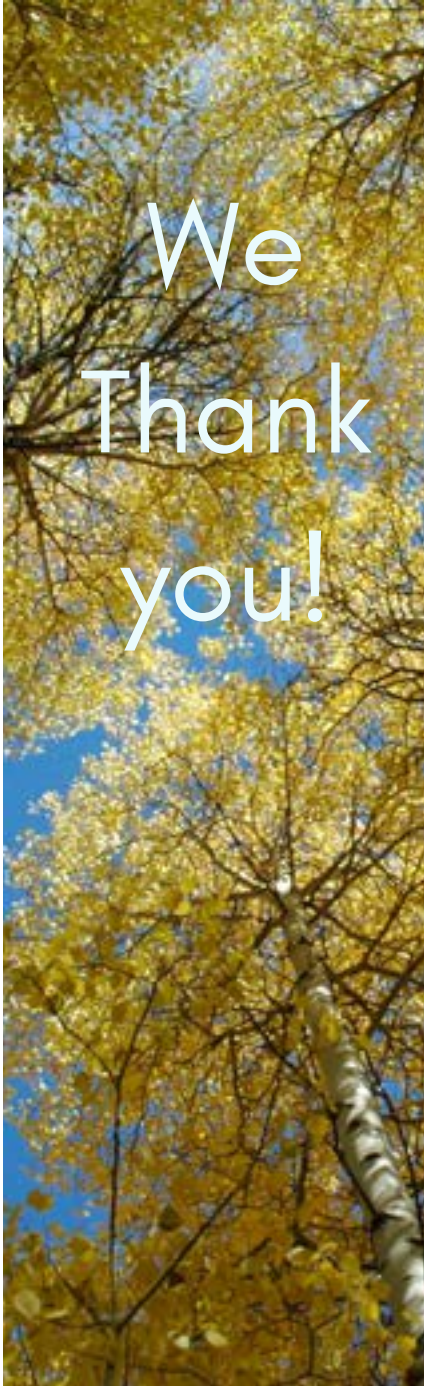
The elevated trail will reduce erosion and sediment entering the reservoir, and enhance the recreational experience and visitor safety.

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We  
Thank  
you!

Burland Homeowners' Assn  
Newmont Legacy Fund  
Pikes Peak Trout Unlimited  
Shell Matching  
Swayback Ranck Fishing Club  
Twilio  
Ute Lakes Fishing & Recreation Club

In Memory of JoAnn Dufty

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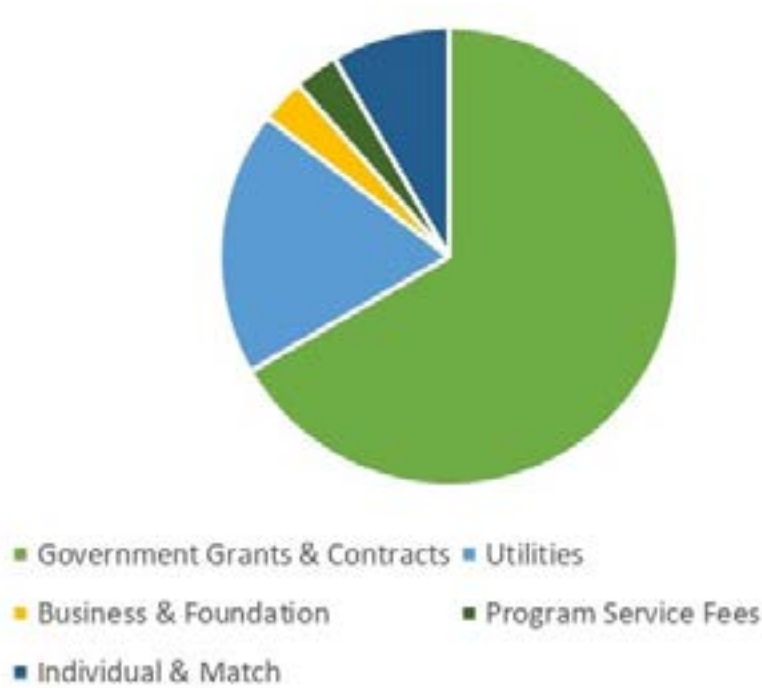
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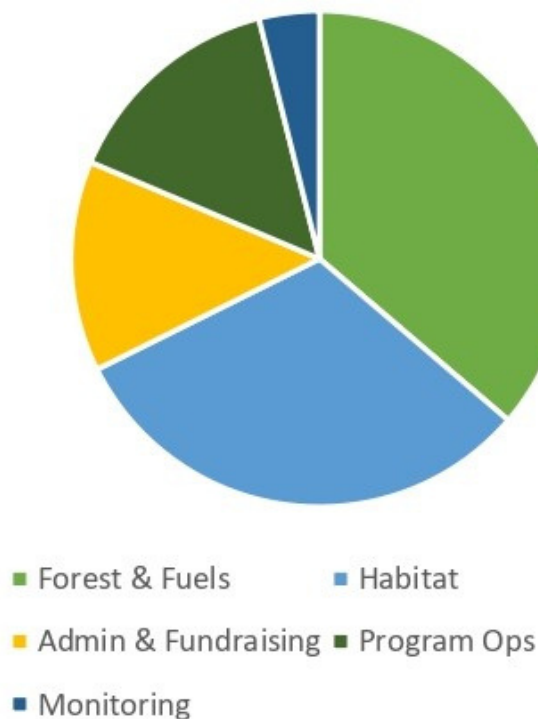


# FINANCIALS

## 2020 Revenue Sources



## 2020 Expenses



## Grantors and Supporters

Centennial Water & Sanitation District  
Center of Colo Water Conservancy Dist  
City of Aurora  
Colo Dept of Agriculture  
Colo Dept of Public Health & Environment  
Colo Parks & Wildlife  
Colo Springs Utilities  
Colo State Forest Service  
Denver Water  
Douglas, Jefferson, & Teller Counties  
Historical Green Mtn Falls  
Rocky Mtn Recreation Center  
South Park Nat'l Heritage Area  
South Platte Enhancement Board  
The Nature Conservancy  
Upper South Platte Water Conservancy Dist  
USDA Forest Service

