



SHARED EXPERIENCE:

FUNDING

Water Quality Program Name: [Rivers of Colorado Water Watch Network \(River Watch\)](#)

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How Colorado's River Watch is Funded

Submitted by Barb Horn, January 2013

Colorado: Colorado River Watch Network was established in 1989 because the Colorado Health Department was making Clean Water Act decisions with one or no data points. There was an early misconception that more data would be linked with more regulation. The health department had limited resources to implement all the necessary monitoring. Colorado River Watch was created to fill that data void. Now, its data are utilized routinely at a local level and in Clean Water Act decisions.



[Colorado River Watch Logo](#)

River Watch uses a unique partnership model for both funding and data collection. A partnership with a non-profit organization, River Watch, has allowed us to diversify both our funding and programs broader than our agency could provide alone. This is why we have the largest statewide surface water data set in Colorado. River Watch funding has been primarily from a tax on fishing and boating equipment that is administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Agency (FWA). These funds are made available to state wildlife agencies for activities such as building boat ramps and aquatic education. Funding requires a match of support, which can be met through volunteer time. This has provided a stable funding source and allowed our agency to build a sustainable volunteer monitoring program.

The amount of funding from the FWA varies with each state. It is based on the number of fishing licenses sold in that state. It is true that not all state wildlife agencies use the funds for a similar program. This may be in part due to difficulty seeing their role in water quality protection or a clear connection, although it is commonly known that even fish require suitable water quality to thrive and survive. If you can establish a similar relationship and shared understanding, it may help you find volunteers and funding opportunities.

One other cost-saving measure was that we had access to a capable research facility that was underutilized. Analytical machines that were being used only once or twice a month allowed us to utilize that extra capacity for cheap, as much as 800% cheaper. We were able to process 26 metals total and dissolved for \$2.50! Whereas, a

typical commercial laboratory price is often around \$520, to analyze these same samples. This has allowed us to provide reliable data at low enough detection limits for many CWA and other uses. Perhaps you can find similar arrangements or search around for a better price for the analyses.

The initial barrier to creating this program was within the Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Even with funding determined, no one wanted to add any additional labor or time to their plate. Thus, we created a model that didn't rely on any CPW staff, except the program manager. At first, other needed staff came with temporary employees (the only other model available the time) and then evolved into a service contract with our non-profit partner. This allowed us to hire professionals and have a consistent interface with volunteers. The downside is internally when cuts come. Because we are not integral to daily life of say game wardens and do not impact their time, we can be seen as not valuable and expendable. We have to constantly educate changing leadership and staff of what we do, value and cost savings. We never had a barrier to getting the data used by our health department.

We have been applying the same model since 1989. It may seem like we have a large budget but relative to what it would cost to cover the same ground commercially it is cheap and why it works and why it was never done before commercially (not feasible). We have and need four to five full time staff to serve 140 groups annually, who monitor about 650 stations per year on 350 some rivers, sampling monthly for field (6 indicators) and metals (26), biannual for nutrients (6) and annually for physical habitat and macroinvertebrates.



Photo from CORW: Volunteers conducting stream habitat assessment.



Photo from CORW: Volunteers sample for macroinvertebrates.