

# The Eagle River Joint Use Water Project

## Project partners and objective

The Cities of Aurora and Colorado Springs (Homestake Partners) entered the 1998 Eagle River Memorandum of Understanding (ERMOU)\* with the Colorado River District, Climax, Eagle River Water & Sanitation District, Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority, and Vail Associates to develop a phased Eagle River Joint Use Water project that would provide critical water supplies to all parties.

- The first phase of the Eagle River Joint Use Water Project has been completed and provides more than 2,000 acre-feet (ac-ft) of dry year yield for the West Slope project participants through construction of Eagle Park Reservoir.

The Homestake Partners remain committed to the development of the next phase of the Eagle River Joint Use Water Project to develop the full ERMOU requirement of 20,000 ac-ft of average annual yield in new water supplies for the Cities.

- The Homestake Partners are identifying and evaluating feasible project alternatives in the upper Eagle River basin that meet the ERMOU objective.
- The Homestake Partners are committed to proceeding with a project alternative that minimizes environmental impacts, is cost effective, technically feasible, can be permitted by local, state and federal agencies, and which will provide sufficient yield to meet the project participants' water supply needs and as defined in the ERMOU.
- One alternative under consideration and evaluation is a potential water supply reservoir along Homestake Creek with a capacity between 6,850-20,000 ac-ft. Pipelines and tunnels could utilize gravity flow to carry water from Peterson, Fall, and Resolution Creeks to the new reservoir and water would then be pumped to the existing Homestake Reservoir for delivery to the cities.

## Current status

The Homestake Partners submitted an SF-299 application to the U.S. Forest Service (Eagle-Holy Cross Ranger District, White River National Forest) on June 25, 2019, as part of the early feasibility study for potential reservoir alternatives.

- As described in the 2019 SF-299 application, the feasibility study is focused in the Homestake Valley, about 6 miles south of Red Cliff, Colo. The proposed action for the study is limited to the following fieldwork activities:
  - geologic mapping (completed Fall 2020);
  - geophysical survey (completed Fall 2021); and
  - subsurface exploration (drilling up to 10 borings of up to 150 feet deep but no more than 8" in diameter at potential dam locations) (completed Fall 2021).

Field work completed in support of the SF-299 application includes biological, ecosystem, cultural and recreational assessments (please refer to the decision memo for details).

The SF299 application was approved on March 22, 2021. Guidelines for survey activity outlined in the permit emphasized that minimal disturbances would be made. Of note:

- Subsurface exploration activities (drilling) would not occur within designated wilderness or roadless areas.
- Seismic survey activities would not occur within designated wilderness areas but could occur within designated roadless areas.
- Temporary access routes would be required to boring locations (but not in the wilderness or roadless areas).
- Final access route would be determined with the White River National Forest to ensure all factors are considered, such as minimal vegetation removal, road departure angle (to avoid future unauthorized use), safety, and minimal disturbance width.

Fieldwork activities were coordinated with the White River National Forest using best management practices and responsible environmental considerations to prevent damage to existing wetlands. The geophysical survey and subsurface exploration activities were completed in Fall 2021 and results are being compiled and analyzed.

### **A look ahead**

- Results of the geotechnical investigations will support a broader planning process to inform future activities related to the Eagle River Joint Use Water Project.
- Any project alternative that is determined to be feasible will require a sequential series of permitting processes that include environmental studies and provide opportunity for full public scoping and comment over the next several years.
- Additional field studies, including definitive wetland delineations, will be included as part of any additional permitting activities.
- Like all water users who depend on the Colorado River as a critical source of supply, the Homestake Partners are mindful of drought conditions experienced in the Colorado River and are incorporating these considerations into their near-term and long-term water planning.

### **\*ERMOU details**

*The ERMOU is a collaborative partnership to develop a phased Eagle River Joint Use Water Project with requirements of 1) up to 10,000 ac-ft of dry year yield for the Eagle Park Reservoir Company (Colorado River District, Eagle River Water & Sanitation District, Upper Eagle Regional Water Authority, and Vail associates), 2) up to 20,000 ac-ft of average annual yield for the Homestake Partners, and 3) up to 3,000 ac-ft of storage capacity for Climax's existing absolute water supplies. Different ERMOU Partners may participate in different or separate future project phases. All project phases will not exceed 30,000 ac-ft of new water supply.*

*The Eagle River Joint Use Project is a trans-basin water supply project that is critical to future water supply for the Cities of Aurora and Colorado Springs. The project is outlined in the 1998 intergovernmental agreement titled Eagle River Memorandum of Understanding (ERMOU) and is an Identified Project & Process (IP&P) in the State of Colorado's Colorado Water Plan and basin roundtable planning for the Arkansas, Colorado, and South Platte River Basins.*