



Big Thompson Watershed News

~ Newsletter of the Big Thompson Watershed Forum ~

Highlights of 2008

As many of you know, 2008 has been a year of transition for the Big Thompson Watershed Forum. Rob Buirgy, a founding member of the Forum and its first Executive Director, announced his resignation in November 2007. Mr. Buirgy explained that an intentional, well-timed transition away from the founding director is essential for a healthy organization, stating that "this is the right time for us to take this important step. The past 12 years have been an auspicious beginning for the Forum, and I am very grateful for the experiences we've shared." Thank you Rob, for your many years of dedicated service, time, energy and outreach in the cause for the Forum!

With Mr. Buirgy's retirement, Program Director, Zack Shelley, took over day to day operations of the Forum. Mr. Shelley and the Board of Directors were faced with some tough choices in 2008 regarding the Forum's budget, staffing and the Forum's core mission. To everyone's credit, we have been able to pull together, work hard, and have made impressive progress in many areas. Here are some of the highlights of 2008 as we moved from a *founding* Board to a *governing* Board.

Water Quality Monitoring

Water quality monitoring and assessment programs continue to be the Forum's forte. Program goals include: 1) Assessing the degree of compliance with existing and anticipated water quality standards; 2) Collaborating with the cities of Loveland, Fort Collins and Greeley, the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (NCWCD) and the Tri-Districts/Soldier Canyon, to assess the trophic state of Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir and flowing water sites through-out the Big Thompson watershed; 3) Assessing the impact of feeder system canals and groundwater loadings to Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir, and; 4) Assessing the magnitude and statistical significance of temporal and spatial trends in ambient surface water quality at select flowing water monitoring sites throughout the Big Thompson River watershed.

The Forum's Cooperative Monitoring and Assessment Program (Coop) is funded by five major partners: The City of Greeley, the City of Fort Collins, the City of Loveland, NCWCD and the Tri-Districts/Soldier Canyon (East Larimer County Water District, North Weld Count Water District and the Fort Collins-Loveland Water District).

In addition, Forum partners were able to devote substantial in-kind contributions to our 2008 Cooperative Monitoring Program (Coop) jointly funded with the U.S. Geological Survey.

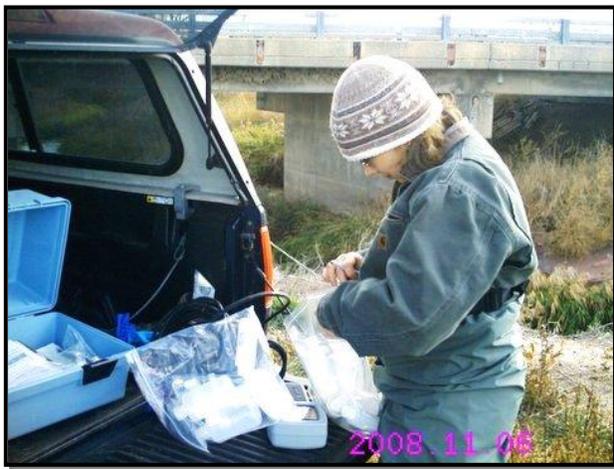
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region VIII, which helps to sponsor the Forum's Volunteer Monitoring Program (VolMon), provided all of the Forum's in-kind laboratory services....**THANK YOU FORUM PARTNERS!**

This solid commitment of funds from our major sponsors, partners, and benefactors has allowed us not only to maintain continuity, but indeed to sample more broadly and more thoroughly. It has also permitted us to augment our array of critical *and expensive* monitoring equipment. Through our Coop and VolMon Programs, we now monitor water quality in the Big Thompson watershed at a total of 31 flowing water sites, 21 times per year, inventorying up to 27 chemical and 5 physical water quality variables at each site.



USGS scientists and sampling crew, Sue Hartley and Karla Burnley, collecting samples from the Big Thompson River...."Sue, I was thinking, why does Zack get to sit on the stream bank fishing and taking pictures while we do all of the hard work..."

These include ammonia plus organic nitrogen, nitrate and total nitrogen, orthophosphate and total phosphorus, total organic carbon, dissolved and total recoverable metals, chlorophyll *a*, Escherichia coli (*E. coli.*), total coliform bacteria, dissolved oxygen, temperature, pH, specific conductance and salinity.



Forum volunteers, Jennifer Stephenson (above) and Robert Alexander (right), collecting samples from the Little Thompson River, a major tributary to the Big Thompson River....."ok, where did Bob put those darn filters?"...."ok, where did Jennifer put those darn syringes?"

With the additional cooperative monitoring being conducted by the cities of Greeley, Loveland, and Fort Collins, as well as the NCWCD and Grand County, we feel that the Forum, its partners and the community are taking a state of the art scientific watershed approach in fulfilling our mission in protecting and improving water quality in the Big Thompson River watershed.



We should also mention that our volunteer sampling crew narrowly missed being clobbered by the tornado that inflicted severe damage to Windsor, Colorado, last May. The

crew, led by Zack Shelley, just finished collecting at sites near Johnstown, Milliken and the confluence with the South Platte River at 10:15 in the morning. The tornado passed immediately over the sampling area just before touching down in Windsor a short time later. Whew!

The Forum would like to say **THANK YOU** to our 10 wonderful volunteers for 2008:

Abiah Shaffer, *Fort Collins, CO*
Arden Piland, *Fort Collins, CO*
Eddie Trevino, *Greeley, CO*
Erik Anglund, *Berthoud, CO*
Fred Renner, *Loveland, CO*
Jennifer Stephenson, *Windsor, CO*
Robert Alexander, *Greeley, CO*
Robert Crawford, *Loveland, CO*
Scott Cornell, *Fort Collins, CO*
Tracy Phelps-Emmanuel, *Boulder, CO*



Forum volunteers, Abiah Shaffer (above) and Tracy Phelps-Emmanuel (left), collecting samples in November from Glacier Creek, a tributary to the Big Thompson River...."bbbrrrrrr.....ice is forming on our waders!.....next year, Forum staff are doing these sites!"



Forum Budget

With considerable support -- and faith -- by all of our major contributors, and an earnest cost cutting effort by the Board and staff, we are pleased to say that the Forum's budget has

gone from red to black over the last 12 months. Though we have a long way to go to achieve several of our more farsighted objectives, our core monitoring and assessment programs have been strengthened and may even grow slightly in the coming year through more frequent sampling and screening for more water quality constituents. Our internal financial controls and bookkeeping have been streamlined, budgets developed and comprehensively tracked, and staffing assignments and compensation better defined. Sound decisions have been made to help grow our reserve budget and seek additional funding for potential future tasks such as the Mariano Exchange Ditch System (MEDS) project where mitigation funding remains unavailable.

Water Quality Assessments

Though our next comprehensive water quality assessment report is not scheduled until 2010, our staff has continued to provide Forum-collected data and information to a variety of 'outside' entities including the state of Colorado's Water Quality Control Division, Colorado Water Conservation Board and Water Quality Control Commission, Colorado State University, the Loveland Police Department, residents in the watershed, environmental engineering consultants and to others indirectly through the North Front Range Water Quality Planning Association.

In addition, we have contributed to the development of the Colorado Water Quality Monitoring Council's Data Sharing Network, have sent comments to the U.S. Forest Service regarding their Environmental Assessments for several proposed livestock grazing allotments potentially affecting water quality in the Big Thompson watershed, and have plans to "publish" the Forum-collected data through a more broadly accessible venue. Finally, Forum staff have begun review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Windy Gap Firing Project to see if or how the Forum's monitoring programs might need to be augmented or changed should this project move forward.

[Forum Annual Meeting](#)



Our annual meeting addresses one of the Forum's key objectives: education and outreach. This year's October meeting, *Voices from the Watershed*, was an unqualified success. We received unanimous kudos for the quality of the seven invited speakers and the timeliness of the material they presented. Topics included mercury in the Rocky Mountains, emerging contaminants in Colorado, the role of nutrients in watershed ecology, invasive aquatic species including zebra mussels, the importance of water quality in the brewing industry, watershed effects from pine beetle infestation and the three

lakes water quality monitoring program in Grand County. The food, too, got rave reviews, along with the meeting venue and location, generously provided by the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District.

The Forum would like to thank our speakers noted below for this year's annual meeting – great job!

Alisa Mast, *United States Geological Survey*
Bill Battaglin, *United States Geological Survey*
Gaspere Bonventre, *Anheuser-Busch*
Jane Tollett, *Grand County Water Information Network*
John Stednick, *Colorado State University*
Ken Kehmeier, *Colorado Department of Wildlife*
Pieter Johnson, *University of Colorado*



Forum's 2008 Annual Meeting at Northern Water in Berthoud.

In addition, the 2008 annual meeting was an excellent example of the Forum's Board of Directors pulling together to collectively accomplish a task formerly covered almost solely by Forum staff. The meeting proved to be an excellent opportunity for attendees to learn and network. We hope you can attend next year.



Forum Vice Chairman of the Board, Dave Cole (center), being recognized by past Chairman, Steve Adams (left) and Ed Young (right), Chairman of the Board, for his years of dedicated service to the Forum and community and the creation of the Dave Cole Environmental Scholarship Fund at the 2009 Annual Meeting. Thanks, Dave! ©

At our annual meeting, we also announced the creation of the Dave Cole Environmental Scholarship Fund. Mr. Cole has been a long-standing Board member, who retired from the Board in December, 2008. In honor of Dave's long standing dedication to the educational objective of the Forum, the Board created this annual scholarship for one or more deserving students. Details forthcoming....



Dave Cole, Forum board member since 2000.

Other Activities of Note

Forum staff and consultants will be featured in an upcoming documentary series of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) TV, "*Statistically Speaking*." The series highlights why statistics are so important in our daily lives and how they give scientists powerful tools with which to analyze water quality data and thereby better manage a region's water quality with respect to toxicity, compliance with water quality standards and water treatment costs.



Dr. Jim Loftis being interviewed at Viestenz-Smith Mountain Park for the Forum's episode on the PBS documentary, "*Statistically Speaking*," to be aired in 2009.

Titled *Retrospective Analysis of Water Quality Data in the Big Thompson Watershed*, the Forum's activities are featured in two of the 32 programs (27 & 31) in the PBS series. We will let you know when this show will be aired as soon as we know (anticipated to be the summer of 2009).



PBS producer, Jim Jackson and crew taking footage of USGS sampling techniques in the Big Thompson River in Rocky Mountain National Park.

The Forum has also participated in the City of Loveland's Spring Cleanup and Fall Big Thompson River Cleanup, surveys with Colorado State University and presentations to the Loveland Boys and Girls Club, local Girl Scouts Chapter, and Loveland Police Department.

Winner -- Larimer County Environmental Stewardship Award!

Finally, if it was only the Board of Directors who trumpeted this year's Forum successes, you -- our contributors -- might be skeptical. But we are extremely pleased to announce that the Forum's Volunteer Monitoring Program is one of the recipients of this year's Larimer County Environmental Stewardship Award. This award goes to individuals and organizations that are **"innovative and proactive, and that demonstrate exceptional effort and concern for the stewardship of the environment."**



The Commissioners said the award was offered to the Forum, "for their impressive commitment to the environment and collaboration with community volunteers to collect water samples." "The Big Thompson Watershed is crucial for providing drinking water for numerous municipalities and water for agricultural, recreational and natural habitat purposes. Water quality samples collected as a result of this program allow the Forum to compare sample results with water quality standards and to identify water quality trends within the watershed. The volunteer monitoring program also increases community awareness and understanding of watershed issues and the importance of good stewardship. The result is an effective blend of science and community involvement that benefits the Big Thompson River." We can all celebrate that they got that one right!

Forum Mission

The mission of the Big Thompson Watershed Forum is to protect and improve water quality in the Big Thompson River watershed through collaborative monitoring, assessment, education and restoration. The Forum fosters stakeholder teamwork by conducting scientifically sound

watershed assessments, identifying priority protection measures, educating affected interests, and promoting voluntary practices that protect the quality of Big Thompson waters. The Forum monitors nutrients, pathogens, metals and other physical parameters, and reports on the health of the watershed. We are funded by 12 major Benefactors -- and by you, our loyal individual contributors!

For details on our 2009 monitoring and assessment programs, outreach and more information about the Forum, visit www.btwatershed.org. The Forum's Monitoring & Assessment Program Director, Zack Shelley, may be reached at 970-613-6163 or zshelley@btwatershed.org.

**Please forward this message to others
who may be interested in the Forum's activities.**

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**PLEASE BECOME OR CONTINUE TO BE A PART OF THE LEADING
WATER QUALITY PROTECTION ORGANIZATION IN OUR REGION**

With your **tax-deductible** financial support in 2009, we will be able to gather an even wider array of water quality monitoring data, produce better periodic assessments and conduct more community outreach and education.....

We have established several different levels of individual and corporate support:

Benefactor	\$1000 or more
Sponsor	\$500
Patron	\$250
Sustainer	\$100
Individual	\$25
Student	Free

Please send a check for your annual donation *along with your email address* to:

*Big Thompson Watershed Forum
800 South Taft Avenue
Loveland, CO 80537*

Your cancelled check may be used as your receipt.

Thank You Very Much for Your Support!

Forum Major Benefactors

**City of Greeley
City of Fort Collins
City of Fort Morgan
City of Loveland
Larimer County
Northern Water (NCWCD)**

**Thompson School District R2J
Town of Estes Park
Tri-Districts/Soldier Canyon
U.S. Environment Protection Agency R8
U.S. Geological Survey
Weld County**