

STATE OF COLORADO

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

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Chatfield Downstream Channel Improvement Project Maintenance and Repair Activities FACT SHEET and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Background Information

Through Senate Bill 79-537 the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) appropriated State funds in order to match federal funds from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to implement the Chatfield Downstream Channel Improvement Project (Project). The funds were used to purchase lands along the South Platte River below Chatfield Reservoir and to design and build flood protection measures. The total length of the Project is approximately four miles, beginning at Columbine Valley (downstream of the Littleton Floodplain Park, or South Platte Park) and continuing downstream to the confluence with Bear Creek near Hampden Avenue. The Project reach is owned and managed by the CWCB with assistance from the Urban Drainage & Flood Control District (District) to carry out responsibilities as prescribed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). The South Platte Park reach is approximately two miles long and is managed as a natural area by the South Suburban Parks and Recreation District (SSPRD).

Is the South Platte River below Chatfield Reservoir really a flood control project?

YES. Agreements between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the State of Colorado in 1977 and 1980 dictate roles and responsibilities for overall maintenance and easements along the designated right-of-way. Those agreements include information on how the Project should be maintained and operated, and discuss the Corps the authority to inspect the Project. The agreements further declare that if for any reason the State fails to manage, operate, repair, and maintain the flood control Project according to the Operation & Maintenance (O&M) Manual, then the Project would become ineligible for Government assistance under Public Law 84-99. Portions of the South Platte River banks through this reach were lined with rock (riprap) and designed to handle large amounts of flow releases from Chatfield Reservoir for flood control purposes. Encroachment of vegetation into the river channel has the potential to raise water surface levels and could impact the conveyance of flood flows down the river. Failure to remove unwanted vegetation growth in the Project reach would lead to an "unacceptable" rating by the Corps. Should that occur, Congressional offices, county and state emergency management

offices, and FEMA would be alerted to the situation which could impact floodplain maps and flood insurance needs for properties located along the river.

What maintenance work is required?

As prescribed in the O&M Manual for the Project, the CWCB performs routine maintenance through agreements with the District and in response to annual inspections by the Corps. Examples of activities include culvert cleaning, debris removal, weed control, repair of drop structures, and removal of non-native vegetation such as Russian Olive and Tamarisk trees. In addition, incidental vegetation growth within the flood control channel (or floodway) must be controlled in order to satisfy the Corps requirements and inspection notices.

Does the CWCB need to remove vegetation in the channel and on the river banks?

YES. Simply put, Chatfield Reservoir is designed to store excess runoff during times of flooding, and then release water downstream into the South Platte River. Chatfield can release up to a maximum of 5,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) of flood water if needed, and the Project reach needs to function as originally designed and constructed in order to prevent overbank flooding. The focus of vegetation management is from the top of the channel slopes down into the river channel, including sand bars and point bars in the river. Native vegetation from the tops of the banks will generally not be removed. Healthy large cottonwood trees are not targeted for removal by the CWCB.

The first stage of the vegetation management effort was to spray an aquatic safe herbicide to willows in the channel bottom and then cut and remove willows in the late summer or early fall. The pilot area for Willow removal was in 2007 where 8 acres of willows (on sandbars) were removed between Bowles Avenue to just upstream of the Union Avenue Boat Chutes. As required by the Corps, the CWCB developed a plan to remove willows on the Project river banks by the end of 2010.

The most recent contract (phase) calls for vegetation management (willow and non-native tree removal) along the west bank of the river from Columbine Valley downstream to Bowles Avenue. In addition, willow and non-native tree removal will occur on the east bank of the river from Bowles Avenue downstream to Union Avenue. This work will be accomplished by three separate contractors and will begin in August of 2009. The work is scheduled for completion by November 2009.

Is the CWCB performing environmental mitigation?

YES. In some cases there is so much vegetation on the banks of the river that vegetation management efforts can be considered as beneficial to recreation interests as well as to fish and wildlife habitat. In spring 2008 the CWCB collaborated with SSPRD to plant 50 new trees along the west bank of the river from Prince Street to Belleview Avenue. The following trees added new diversity to the South Platte River ecosystem: Western River Birch, Thornless cockspur Hawthorn, Canada red Cherry, Autumn Brilliance Serviceberry, Eastern Redbud, Hotwings Tatarian Maple, Ohio Buckeye, Ginnalla Maple, American Plum, common Chokecherry, and Gambel Oak. The CWCB will continue to work with SSPRD and other interested parties to plant additional trees to the extent possible with available funding.

The CWCB will also work with L&M Enterprises to plant 12 new large trees in locations directed by the South Suburban Parks and Recreation District, which is scheduled for late September/early October 2009. The CWCB will also fund approximately 50 new smaller trees that will be planted along the river by South Suburban Parks and Recreation District in October 2009. The CWCB is committed to partnering with other entities and groups to support river improvements that help offset any impacts from required maintenance activities along the Chatfield Downstream Channel Improvement Project pursuant to state and federal agreements.

Is the herbicide being used for vegetation management safe?

YES. Glypho and similar weed removal chemicals are EPA approved as safe in and near riparian zones. It is the same product used by many local, state, and federal governments for vegetation management. The specimen label for Glypho indicates “For control of annual and perennial weeds and woody plants in forests, non crop sites, and in and around aquatic sites.....” Specifications and regulations on the Glypho are available on the internet at <http://www.cdms.net/manuf/1prod.asp?pd=4272&lc=0>.

Who can I contact to comment on the maintenance or the environmental mitigation?

The CWCB welcomes feedback and comments on our maintenance and responsibilities for the Chatfield Downstream Channel Improvement Project. Comments should be in writing via email or mail and directed to the Joe Busto at the CWCB, rather than to the UDFCD or the on-site maintenance contractors. The CWCB will address questions and concerns on behalf of all of the Project partners. Contact information:

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