

For Immediate Release

Save The Poudre Coalition

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HALLOWEEN SURPRISE FOR THE POUFRE RIVER

River Artificially Rages Through Town At The End of October Water Could Be Used to Save The Poudre

Fort Collins, CO -- If you have a chance to walk down to the Poudre River before Nov. 1st, you will see a yearly event -- the Halloween Surprise For The Poudre River. The river routinely rages through Fort Collins at the end of October, often 10 or even 20 times higher than it flowed in the weeks and months before Halloween. And, it abruptly ends at the beginning of November.

This "Surprise" is not a natural event, but a remnant of Colorado's arcane water laws. The State of Colorado's official "water year" starts on November 1st and ends on October 31st, and so as the end of the water year approaches, water users trade thousands of acre feet of water up and down the Poudre and use it to fill reservoirs on the eastern plains. The law requires that they "use it or lose it" by midnight on October 31st, and so the water that was stored in Horsetooth and in the mountain reservoirs is flushed through Fort Collins and is diverted into ditches and plains reservoirs.

The graph below, measured in downtown Fort Collins, depicts 5 days of river flows up until noon on October 29th. In past years, these flows will continue through Halloween -- sometimes even spiking twice as high, up to 1,200 cubic feet per second -- and then taper off soon afterwards. In the graph below (not shown), the river goes from 50 cfs to 500 cfs in one day, spiking in completely unnatural cycles.

The total accumulation of water that flushes through town at the end of October amounts to at least 5,000 acre feet annually, sometimes much more. Ironically, that same amount of water -- 5,000 acre feet -- was recently cited as the amount needed to keep a "minimum instream flow" in the Poudre River through Fort Collins all year round.

A scientific article by retired Fort Collins U.S.G.S ecologist, John Bartholow, points to 5,000 acre feet as a number that would keep at least 20 cfs flowing through Fort Collins all year round. Bartholow's graph and paper citation are here: http://poudreriver.home.comcast.net/~poudreriver/Poudre_InstreamFlow_Bartholow-08.pdf

"With cooperation and legal maneuvering, the dry-ups on the Poudre could possibly be fixed right now," said Gary Wockner of the Save The Poudre Coalition. "This

'Halloween Surprise' points out that there is not a shortage of water, but a shortage of human cooperation to fix this environmental problem."

One of the Save The Poudre Coalition's goals is to create an "Instream Flow Program" for the Poudre River. The Coalition is interested in working with any water provider to help make that happen.

"The threat of new dams and reservoirs has created massive conflict on the Poudre," continued Wockner. "But there's also a massive opportunity to cooperate and keep this river alive."

The Save The Poudre Coalition is made up of 16 national, state, and regional groups including: National Wildlife Federation, Clean Water Action, Defenders of Wildlife, American Rivers, American Whitewater Association, Western Resource Advocates, Colorado Environmental Coalition, Lighthawk, Environment Colorado, Sierra Club – Rocky Mountain Chapter, Fort Collins Audubon Society, Citizen Planners, Wolverine Farm Publishing, Poudre Paddlers, Friends of the Poudre, and the Cache la Poudre River Foundation. Membership in these groups totals over 3 million American citizens.