



UPPER YAMPA WATER  
— CONSERVANCY DISTRICT —

# 2025-2030 Strategic Plan



# Table of Contents

---

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Future Scenarios .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Policy Statements .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Strategic Initiatives .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Water Supply .....	4
Agricultural Partnerships and Infrastructure .....	5
Water Quality and Wildfire Mitigation.....	5
<b>The District’s Perpetual Work .....</b>	<b>6</b>

*Facilitation provided by the  
Civic Consulting Collaborative*



# Executive Summary

---

The Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District (the District) was created in 1966 to serve as a steward of water resources in the Upper Yampa River Basin. The District continues to play a vital role in sustaining Upper Yampa water resources through core work such as managing Stagecoach and Yamcolo Reservoirs, emerging efforts to support environmental needs and water quality, as well as collaboration with constituents, local organizations, and state agencies.

Like many water management entities, the District faces a future with more frequent drought and wildfires due to climate-change, increasing complexity to manage a wider diversity of beneficial uses, and growing water demand from within and outside the basin. This updated strategic plan charts a path into that future that honors the District's history, builds on its current work, and equips the District to continue meeting the needs of water users and the overall Upper Yampa Basin. The plan includes five sections: Introduction, Future Scenarios, Policy Statements, Strategic Initiatives, and The District's Perpetual Work.

Today, the core, perpetual work of the District includes the following:

- **Water Rights Portfolio:** Maintain and improve the District's water rights portfolio, ensuring flexibility for environmental and recreational uses.
- **Infrastructure:** Maintain and improve District infrastructure, including safe operation of Stagecoach and Yamcolo Reservoirs.
- **Strong Staff:** Support and maintain skilled staff, legal, and administrative resources to effectively serve constituents.
- **Financial Resources:** Manage District finances sustainably to support long-term goals and responsibilities.
- **Colorado River Compact:** Advocate for Yampa River water uses in compact negotiations and rulemaking.
- **Augmentation:** Support basin water users through augmentation plans protecting junior priority water rights.
- **Grant Programs:** Provide grants that address the needs of District water users.
- **Market Water:** Market reservoir water contracts for municipal, agricultural, industrial, environmental, and recreational use.
- **Local and State Policy:** Represent District interests in local and state water policy matters.
- **Public Outreach and Partnerships:** Expand public understanding and build partnerships to improve Yampa Basin water resources.

In addition to the District's perpetual work, this plan outlines three Strategic Initiatives to advance the District in key areas over the next five years (see table on next page).

## Water Supply

**5-Year Goal:** Within five years, the District shall construct the new domestic water well for Stagecoach State Park, and advance Stagecoach and Yamcolo firming projects.

### Strategies

- Construct the new domestic water well for Stagecoach State Park.
- Create a Bear River Water Users and Storage Working Group.
- Advocate for the USFS Bear River Forest Plan to be updated.
- Renew Stagecoach firming project efforts, incl. technical analysis and permitting.

## Agricultural Partnerships and Infrastructure

**5-Year Goal:** Within five years, strengthen relationships with agricultural water users across the District through outreach and support that helps producers modernize infrastructure and adapt to a changing climate and regulatory environment.

### Strategies

- Enhance partnerships with CSU extension, Routt County Conservation District, and Community Agricultural Alliance to identify opportunities for education and outreach including meaningful demonstration projects.
- Increase human resources to build and manage a database of water users and identify key agricultural leaders to help promote the District as a trusted source for water information and resources.
- Strategically continue to use the grant program to support producers in the modernization and resiliency of agricultural diversion and storage infrastructure.

## Water Quality And Wildfire Mitigation

**5-Year Goal:** Within five years, complete the first iteration of the upper basin (Bear River-Stagecoach) water quality model, including mitigation recommendations, and definition of District responsibilities. Implement Phase 1 of Wildfire Mitigation project.

### Water Quality Strategies

- Continue current efforts with water quality consultant.
- Finalize communication plan with CPW regarding Stagecoach algae blooms.
- Identify funds for mitigation within the budget.
- Engage in policy proposals at CDPHE relevant to District facilities and operations.
- Engage in county permitting process for development proposals in Upper Yampa source watersheds on water supply and water quality matters.

### Wildfire Strategies

- Hire forestry contractor to reduce fuels that could impact high risk water infrastructure in the Bear River watershed.
- Complete USFS authorization/permit efforts.
- Prioritize non-fuel reduction tasks, such as culverts, and emergency preparedness.

# Introduction

---

## Founding and History

The Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District (the District) was created in 1966 to serve as a steward of water resources in the Upper Yampa River Basin. Rooted in the recognition that water is both the lifeblood of agriculture and the foundation of community prosperity, the District was established to develop, manage, and protect the water supplies essential to the region's future. Over the decades, the District has invested in infrastructure such as Stagecoach and Yamcolo Reservoirs, ensuring reliable storage, delivery, and management of water for a wide range of uses. The District has consistently balanced its founding mission—to support agriculture and local economies—with an evolving responsibility to meet the broader needs of a growing region.

## Current Efforts

Today, the District continues to serve as a vital partner in sustaining the Yampa Valley's water resources. Through Stagecoach Reservoir, the District provides contracts that support municipal, environmental, industrial, and recreational releases, helping to maintain the health of the Yampa River and its aquatic ecosystems while also supporting community values tied to outdoor recreation. Yamcolo Reservoir continues to serve as a backbone for agriculture in South Routt County, delivering reliable supplies to irrigators who form the foundation of the valley's working lands and rural character. Beyond these cornerstone efforts, the District collaborates with local governments, state agencies, and community organizations to address pressing water challenges—ranging from drought resilience to long-term river health—always with an eye toward balancing diverse needs.

## The Need for Strategic Planning

As water challenges grow more complex—with shifting hydrology, increasing demands, and heightened awareness of the ecological importance of healthy rivers—the District recognizes the importance of looking ahead. An updated strategic plan provides the opportunity to reaffirm the District's mission, clarify priorities, and align resources with the most pressing needs of the basin. This plan is not only about setting goals; it is about charting a thoughtful course that honors the District's history, builds on its current work, and equips it to serve future generations. By doing so, the District will continue to be a trusted steward of the Yampa River system and a reliable partner to the communities, ranches, ecosystems, and economies that depend on it.

# Future Scenarios

---

The potential future scenarios listed below describe the long-term future that the Upper Yampa is facing and the future that the District is working to achieve. As such, these scenarios set the District up for success over the next five years.

## Business as Usual – The Good

Responsible fiscal management ensures the District’s reservoirs will continue to be well operated and maintained, and there are sufficient water rights yet to be developed to meet growing needs and reduced storage supplies. This fiscal management will remain a cornerstone of the District even in the face of a shifting tax base. Trust in the district has grown over the last five years, and the District is prepared to continue to build this trust throughout the region with all of its constituents through education, outreach, and the grants program. The District has, and will continue to, preserve in basin uses and a robust water rights portfolio in the face of potential out-of-basin exports of water or curtailment from downstream interests.

## Business as Usual – Future Challenges

The Upper Yampa region will face several growing challenges over the coming decades, including climate change related droughts and shifting hydrology. This is already leading to expanded in-basin river administration and may lead to further curtailment of water rights due to the Colorado River Compact. In this changing environment, reservoir levels will likely decline, and producers will face growing challenges complicated by aging infrastructure. In addition to supply challenges, water quality concerns are expanding throughout the region due to continued use practices in a changing environment. Water needs are expanding at the same time, with increases due to development and there will continue to be growing affordability issues in the region.

Yampa River Basin water, land, and resource managers and planners have long been aware of the threats that wildfire poses to their water supply. Nearly every local watershed and/or wildfire planning document acknowledges that post-fire erosional and snowpack impacts to water supply and infrastructure are concerns for the basin communities. The combined physical and community pressures on basin water supplies may lead to increased competition and conflict for Yampa River water leaving the District challenged to meet reservoir release requirements.

## Desired State

Constituents of the District understand and appreciate the balance the District maintains with competing interests. Water users of the District are prepared for and adapting to shifting conditions related to climate change and water rights administration. Raw water diversion and storage infrastructure for all users is modernized, and municipal suppliers and agricultural producers within the basin enjoy access to raw water at reasonable rates. The District benefits from partnerships that promote conservation and healthy rivers and watersheds. The District remains financially sustainable with a robust water rights portfolio and varied customer base. District owned and operated infrastructure continues to be safely operated and maintained. In partnership with others, understand water quality in District-owned facilities and its contributing factors.

## Policy Statements

---

The following policy statements were adopted in 2020 as part of the District's (UYWCD) Strategic Plan and continue to guide decision making.

1. The UYWCD will be financially sustainable and able to meet its stated goals.
2. The UYWCD relies on healthy functioning reservoirs, rivers, and streams in the Upper Yampa Basin for its agricultural, environmental, municipal, commercial, industrial, domestic and recreational cultures, and thus, its economic future.
3. The UYWCD is committed to serving the public in agricultural, municipal, commercial, domestic and industrial uses, and identifying opportunities to support water-based environmental and recreational values.
4. Climate change will be considered in planning.
5. The UYWCD is committed to maintaining the structural and functional integrity and protecting the water rights of the UYWCD's Yamcolo and Stagecoach reservoirs.
6. Collaboration in watershed management is important to advancing the UYWCD's mission.
7. The UYWCD recognizes the critical economic, socio-cultural values, aesthetic, and environmental contributions that ranching and agriculture provide to the Basin.
8. Direct flow and storage water requirements of prudent industrial uses, such as energy development and production, will be considered in planning for the economic welfare of the UYWCD.
9. The UYWCD recognizes the importance of a long-term municipal water supply in creating a vibrant, diverse, and resilient local economy.

10. The UYWCD recognizes that water-based outdoor recreational activities are critical to a thriving and resilient local economy.
11. The UYWCD's ability to manage and develop water resources within its boundaries are crucial to safeguarding the Basin's water supply and depend largely upon local land use policies and practices.
12. The UYWCD recognizes the importance of science-based water quality programs in maintaining the chemical, physical, biological, and aesthetic integrity of the Basin's reservoirs, rivers, and streams.
13. The UYWCD will participate in local and statewide deliberative processes to address climate, environmental, agricultural, social, political, legal, and economic challenges as they affect water resources.
14. The UYWCD opposes any new transfers of stream flow or storage water from the Upper Yampa River Basin and its tributaries to other basins.
15. The UYWCD will evaluate future water works that may be important to the UYWCD's long-term success.
16. As a taxpayer-supported public entity, the UYWCD will promote a two-way exchange of ideas and information with our community and constituents regarding the UYWCD's programs and priorities.

## Strategic Initiatives

---

The following three strategic initiatives represent the top priorities over the next five years to best advance both the District and the Upper Yampa Basin toward achieving the desired state.

### Water Supply

**5-Year Goal:** Within five years, the District shall construct the new domestic water well for Stagecoach State Park, and advance Stagecoach and Yamcolo firming projects.

#### Strategies

- Construct the new domestic water well for Stagecoach State Park.
- Create a Bear River Water Users and Storage Working Group.
- Advocate for the USFS Bear River Forest Plan to be updated.
- Renew Stagecoach firming project efforts, including technical analysis and permitting.

## Agricultural Partnerships and Infrastructure

**5-Year Goal:** Within five years, strengthen relationships with agricultural water users across the District through outreach and support that helps producers modernize infrastructure and adapt to a changing climate and regulatory environment.

### Strategies

- Enhance partnerships with CSU extension, Routt County Conservation District, and Community Agricultural Alliance to identify opportunities for education and outreach including meaningful demonstration projects.
- Increase human resources to build and manage a database of water users and identify key agricultural leaders to help promote the District as a trusted source for water information and resources.
- Strategically continue to use the grant program to support producers in the modernization and resiliency of agricultural diversion and storage infrastructure.

## Water Quality and Wildfire Mitigation

**5-Year Goal:** Within five years, complete the first iteration of the upper basin (Bear River-Stagecoach) water quality model, including mitigation recommendations, and definition of District responsibilities. Implement Phase 1 of Wildfire Mitigation project.

### Strategies

#### Water Quality

- Continue current efforts with water quality consultant.
- Finalize communication plan with CPW regarding Stagecoach algae blooms.
- Identify funds for mitigation within the budget.
- Engage in policy proposals at CDPHE relevant to District facilities and operations.
- Engage in county permitting process for development proposals in Upper Yampa source watersheds on water supply and water quality matters.

#### Wildfire

- Hire forestry contractor to reduce fuels that could impact high risk water infrastructure in the Bear River watershed.
- Complete USFS authorization/permit efforts.
- Prioritize non-fuel reduction tasks, such as culverts, and emergency preparedness.

# The District's Perpetual Work

---

The District has many core responsibilities that it continues to conduct in perpetuity, including:

- **Water Rights Portfolio:** Continue to maintain, and where appropriate, perfect the District's water rights portfolio and increase flexibility to provide water for environmental and recreational purposes.
- **Infrastructure:** Continue to ensure the District's infrastructure is safe and maintained or improved as needed to serve the needs of the District. This includes maintaining Stagecoach and Yamcolo Reservoirs as public recreation facilities.
- **Strong Staff:** Continue the commitment to a strong and skilled staff, legal and administrative resources to ensure District's viability and ability to effectively serve its constituents.
- **Financial Resources:** Continue to manage the District's financial resources sustainably to meet its stated purpose and goals.
- **Colorado River Compact:** Continue to advocate for Yampa River water resources and uses in compact related negotiations and rulemaking.
- **Augmentation:** Continue to support the water users of the basin through augmentation plans that aid in protecting the beneficial uses of junior priority water rights.
- **Grant Program(s):** Continue to support the needs of water users within the District through grant programs.
- **Market Water:** Continue to market water contracts out of the District's reservoirs for beneficial use, including for municipal, agricultural, industrial, environmental and recreational benefit.
- **Local and State Policy:** Continue to represent the District's interests in local and state matters regarding water resources policy, legislative, administrative, regulatory, and judicial matters.
- **Public Outreach and Partnerships:** Continue to increase public understanding of water issues in the Upper Yampa Basin and the role of the District in addressing them. Continue to work with partners to support achieving the desired state of water resources in the Yampa River Basin.