

GRAND COUNTY LEARNING BY DOING

A new approach to managing aquatic resources

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Highlights of '19

Accomplishments from Last Year

02

A Unique Partnership

About Learning By Doing

03

Projects

What Learning By Doing Does

80

Operations

About LBD's Operations Subcommittee

10

Monitoring

About LBD's Monitoring Subcommittee

11

Media and Outreach

LBD's Approach to Informing Communities

12

Formation

A 2019 Learning By Doing Milestone

13

Investing

LBD's Financial Accomplishments

14

Next Steps

Goals for the Upcoming Year

Highlights of 2019

Learning By Doing highlights and accomplishments from last year.

Established LBD as a Non-Profit Corporation

in the State of Colorado.

Planted 1,500 Willow Stakes

with volunteer participation to shade a section of Ranch Creek impaired by stream temperature exceedances.

Pursued Two New Projects

for 2020, securing partial grant support.

Invested \$40,514

in the implementation of an extensive monitoring program.

Made Recommendations

for coordinating water operations in the Fraser and Upper Colorado River basins.

Removed 330 Tons

of highway traction sand from the Fraser River.

Implemented Aquatic Resource Monitoring Plan

including collection of stream temperature, macroinvertebrate and sediment data.

Received \$21,000 +

in financial support through a local lodging surcharge.



ormed from intergovernmental agreements tied to the permitting of two water diversion projects — the Windy Gap Firming Project (Northern Water Subdistrict) and Gross Reservoir Expansion Project (Denver Water) — the LBD stakeholder group works to monitor and restore aquatic habitat within the LBD Cooperative Effort Area (CEA). The CEA includes the Colorado, Fraser and Williams Fork River basins, upstream of the Colorado River confluence with the Blue River.

LBD's Management Committee includes representatives from the following organizations:

- · Grand County, Colorado
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW)
- Colorado River District
- Denver Water
- Northern Water
- Middle Park Water Conservancy District
- · Trout Unlimited

A <u>Technical Committee</u>, which includes additional stakeholders, advises the LBD Management Committee.

Despite the fact that dedicated resources for LBD will not be available until outstanding permits (including legal challenges) for the two diversion projects have concluded, LBD partners began working together five-years ago to build the foundation for this collaborative effort.

Since that time, LBD's ongoing work includes documenting existing aquatic monitoring efforts and implementing supplemental monitoring efforts where needed, prioritizing river reaches where restoration is needed, implementing river restoration projects using grants and partners' contributions, and coordinating the voluntary releases of environmental water to respond to low flows and high stream temperatures. Once final permits are obtained, additional resources will be made available to LBD to continue its work to preserve and, where possible, improve the health of the rivers and the aquatic habitat in Grand County.

The following report describes the highlights of LBD's collaborative effort in 2019.



Learning By Doing measures success by its projects.

To learn more about project partnership, download the guidelines for public/private partnerships on the Learning By Doing website.

The Learning By Doing Committee selects projects based on recommendations from the Grand County Stream Management Plan, available resources, involvement of affected landowners and other considerations.

Hammond Ditch Improvement Project

The project involves channel stabilization, prevention of fish entrainment and improving the diversion structure. Contingent on ditch owners' approval, design and construction are expected to take place in 2020.

Cabin Creek AOP Culvert Project

Learning By Doing has put components in place to design and replace a culvert on Cabin Creek under Forest Service Road 128 with an AOP culvert to provide habitat connectivity for native Colorado River Cutthroat Trout. Learning By Doing's collaborative approach to this project involves Denver Water conducting a topographic survey, and the U.S. Forest Service providing the engineering with its design slated for completion in early 2020.

Grand County will be requested to provide a portion of the needed materials. This project integrates multiple objectives, including improvements to habitats, fish passage, and water supply delivery.



Ranch Creek Riparian Habitat Restoration

In 2019, Learning By Doing and the Colorado River
Headwaters Chapter of Trout Unlimited partnered for
a second year on a revegetation project for a 1.0-mile
section of Ranch Creek. Ranch Creek is on Colorado
Department of Public Health and Environment's Section
303(d) List of Impaired Waters for temperature.

The partners recruited 75 volunteers to harvest 1,500 nearby willow stakes and plant them along the stream bank to provide a shaded canopy.

LBD also partnered in planning and implementing other much-needed river habitat projects.

330 tons is equal to three Air Force Onesize planes or 660,000 pounds. That is a lot of sand.

Fraser River Sediment Pond

Learning By Doing continued to partner with the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT), the East Grand Water Quality Board and the Town of Winter Park in its seventh year to remove traction sand used along Highway 40 from the Fraser River. In 2019, the pond captured and CDOT removed 330 tons of sand. Since its inception, a total of 3,230 tons of traction sand has been removed.

Monitoring downstream of the sediment pond shows significant habitat improvement.





Colorado River Connectivity Channel

Northern Water and a consortium of water stakeholders are finalizing funding and starting design on this high priority project to modify Windy Gap Reservoir and restore highly impacted aquatic habitat. The project will modify the mainstem reservoir so that it will function as an off-channel reservoir, reconnecting the Colorado River at the confluence with the Fraser River. This will provide a fish passage and enable sediment transfer while also leveraging other efforts to improve conditions above and below the reservoir. The new connectivity channel will be open for public fishing and recreation. LBD partners are involved as lead agencies, funders and advocates.

Partnering to help restore highly impacted aquatic habitat.

Williams Fork River Restoration

This Denver Water project in 2018-2019 improved and enhanced 2.08 river miles of the Williams Fork River upstream and downstream of Williams Fork Reservoir, including 0.86 mile on the Kemp Breeze State Wildlife Area above the confluence with the Colorado River that is open to public fishing. The restoration activities will result in improved low flow conditions, instream habitat diversity, channel stability and streamside vegetation. Denver Water intends to open a portion of its property upstream of the Williams Fork Reservoir to public fishing in the future. The restoration work on the State Wildlife Area was performed by Denver Water in partnership with CPW, with support and collaboration with LBD including habitat and fish migration improvements and water supply delivery improvements.



Before

Channel overwide, long continuous riffles present, limited deep pool habitat at low flows.

9-30-19

Before Williams Fork River Restoration Photo courtesy of Denver Water



After

New point bars direct low flows to central, deeper channel shown on far right. Deeper pools hold boulders and trees with rootballs placed for fish habitat shown in far right.

10-22-19

After Williams Fork River Restoration Photo courtesy of Denver Water

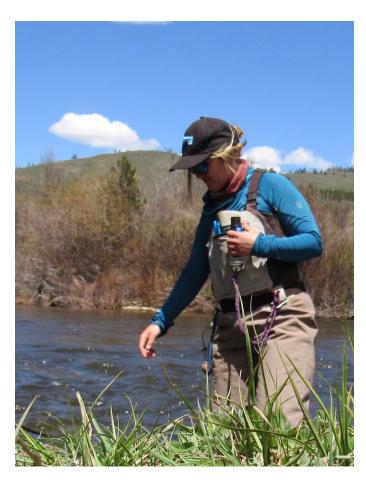


For more in-depth information, access the 2019 Annual Operations Report on the Learning By Doing website. earning By Doing's Operations Subcommittee makes recommendations on the timing of releases of environmental water to respond to low flows and/or high stream temperatures, or to direct flushing flows, when possible. Additionally, it makes requests for operations changes on Denver Water's Moffat Collection System and Williams Fork Reservoir, the River District's Wolford Mountain Reservoir, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Fish 5412 water released by Northern Water from Granby Reservoir. The subcommittee analyzes stream temperature data, hydrologic and water supply forecasts, and water supply system conditions to optimally implement Learning By Doing's Operations Plan.

The coordinated operations calls represent the true spirit of LBD as partners work together to promote, as system flexibility and available water allows, optimum flows for the rivers and their tributaries.

In 2019, an above average snowpack that continued to build into May and early June resulted in a water supply forecast of 129 percent above average (at Kremmling gage). A cool and wet spring and early summer led to a July peak runoff — the latest runoff date posted since 1957. Reservoirs filled on both sides of Colorado's Continental Divide. Due to a heavy precipitation event in late June, Granby Reservoir spilled, including previously pumped Windy Gap water. An extended dry period then followed in August and lasted into early fall.

While plentiful water is always desirable, it led to challenging water operations in 2019.



LBD's stream temperature monitoring consultant takes a reading.

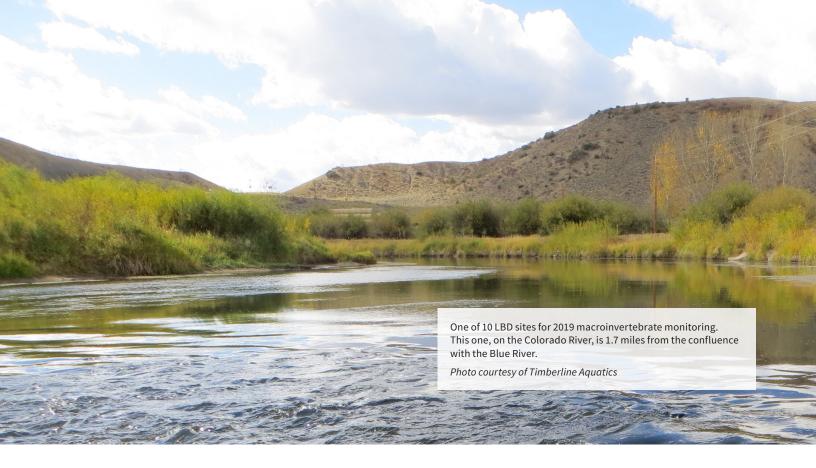
Photo courtesy of Grand County Water Information Network

The Operations Subcommittee prioritized flows on Ranch Creek, which often records temperature exceedances, and, working with Denver Water, was able to enhance native flows on Ranch Creek throughout most of the summer season.

While plentiful water is always desirable, it led to challenging water operations in 2019. Releases of endangered fish water from Granby Reservoir to benefit the 15-mile Critical Habitat reach on the Colorado River near Grand Junction are typically timed to also benefit trout fisheries in the upper portions of the Colorado River. Due to full reservoirs and adequate water in the 15-mile reach in early August, releases from Granby reservoir for the Endangered Fish program were delayed and low flows became a concern in the upper Colorado River.

However, thanks to coordination, the River
District was able to vacate space at Wolford
Reservoir, adding flow to the upper Colorado
River while simultaneously, by exchange, storing
Endangered Fish water for later delivery to the
Critical Habitat reach.

Denver Water coordinated with LBD regarding its construction activities in the Fraser River basin, which required low stream flows during the late and above-average runoff period this summer.



Monitoring

The Monitoring Subcommittee designs and implements a supplemental monitoring program informed by existing monitoring efforts in the Collaborative Effort Area (CEA).

For more in-depth information, access Aquatic Resource Monitoring Plans and Reports on the Learning By Doing website.

he Learning By Doing monitoring program is funded by LBD and five LBD partners. In 2019, LBD conducted a review of the macroinvertebrate monitoring program goals and methodology to ensure that the program's metrics would provide the information needed to track changes in and sufficiently monitor the health of the aquatic ecosystem.

LBD's 2019 Aquatic Resource Monitoring Plan describes monitoring efforts including: stream temperature, sediment, fish populations, macroinvertebrate health, riparian habitat and pre- and post-project monitoring. The monitoring informs LBD on existing conditions in the aquatic habitat and highlights areas that require attention. The 2019 program marks the third consecutive year of LBD managing its own monitoring program, as well as cataloguing existing monitoring efforts in the CEA.

The Monitoring Subcommittee assembled 2018 data in an Aquatic Resource Monitoring Report. Report compilations help inform LBD regarding changes to the aquatic habitat over time.



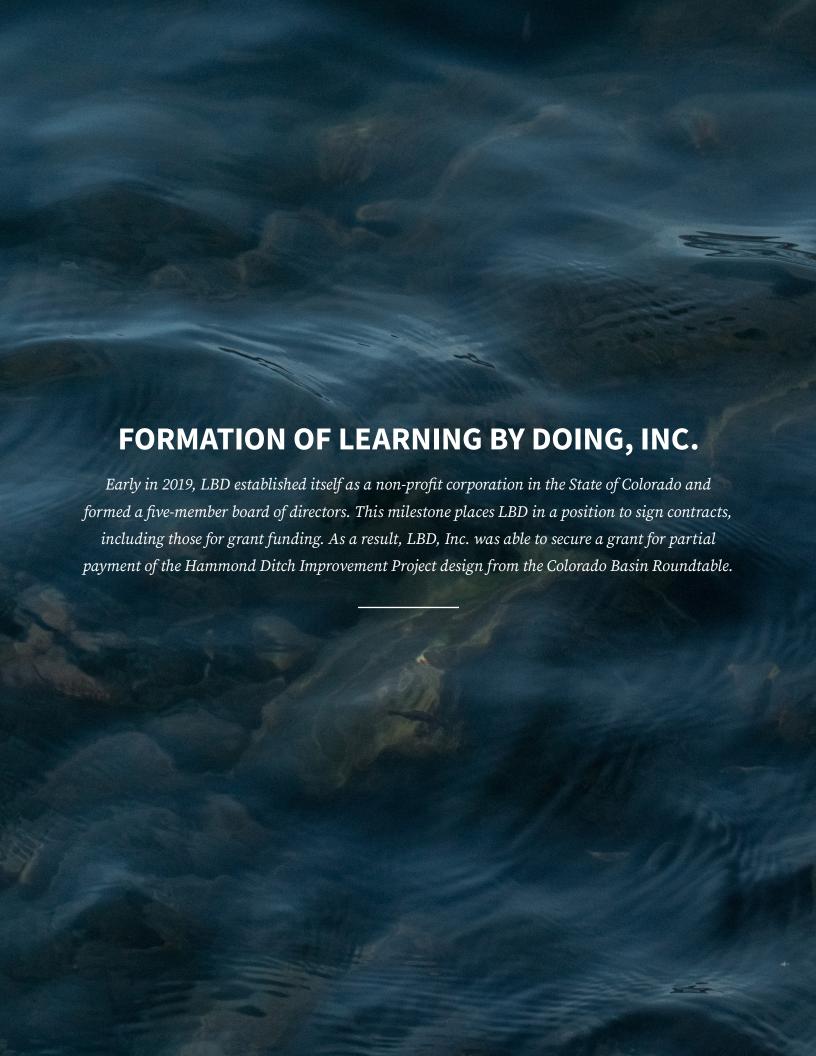
Media and Outreach

Keeping Grand County and people across the state informed of Learning By Doing's new and successful approach to restoring, maintaining and, where possible, enhancing the aquatic habitat.

One of Learning by Doing's members, Kirk Klancke, president of the Colorado River Headwaters Chapter of Trout Unlimited, published a series of articles this past year in the *Winter Park Times*: "When East Meets West over Water Resources" in March, "Healing Our Rivers" in April, and in October, "Sound Bites and Other False Promises." *Colorado Politics* republished the third article in November.

Additionally, in November the *Colorado Sun* covered the efforts of LBD in a feature story, "After decades of negotiations, restoration efforts on Colorado's heavily diverted Fraser River are showing signs of success".

Learning By Doing also told its story of a new approach to managing aquatic resources at the National Water Quality Monitoring Conference, held in Denver, Colorado, in March, with a presentation and a poster session. LBD partners presented updates to community members at the River District-hosted "State of the River" event in Kremmling in May, and the Headwaters Center in Winter Park hosted an LBD panel presentation in October to community members.



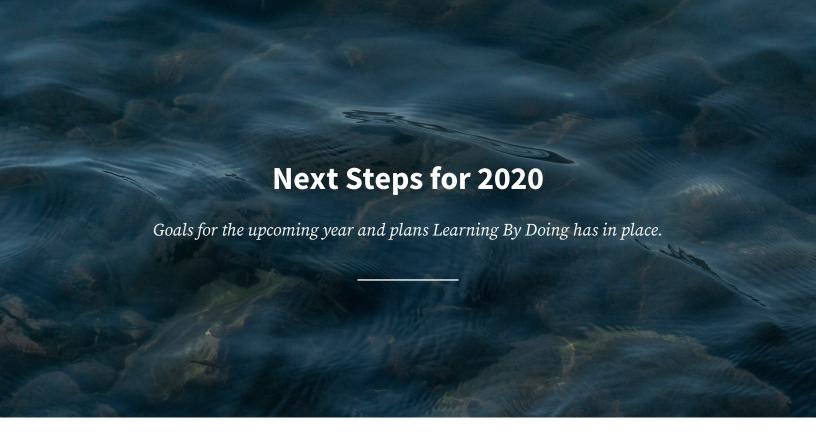


Investing in Learning By Doing

In 2019, Learning By Doing was able to make headway through shared contributions among partners, grants and the local community.

While several million dollars in dedicated Learning By Doing resources are tied to issuance of Denver Water and Northern Water's permits and completion of any legal challenges, which have not yet been met, LBD was able to make headway through shared contributions among partners, grants and the local community.

- Shared monitoring costs among partners, including two shared macroinvertebrate sites with Irrigators of Lands in the Vicinity of Kremmling (ILVK) in 2019, totaled \$40,514.
- A lodging surcharge from Devil's Thumb Ranch dedicated \$21,425.78 to LBD in 2019, and was applied to the Fraser Flats monitoring program.
- A grant award of \$27,000 was received by LBD towards the Hammond Ditch Improvement Project design from the Colorado Basin Roundtable.



- Contingent on ditch owner approval, complete design and implement the Hammond Ditch Improvement Project to prevent fish entrainment, improve the diversion structure, and channel stabilization.
- Complete design and implement replacement of the Cabin Creek culvert with an AOP culvert that will extend habitat for native Colorado River Cutthroat Trout.
- Coordinate with Colorado River Connectivity Channel Stakeholders to release \$1 million in LBD funds for the project and to review improvements for consistency with other LBD projects.
- Explore viability of restoring a 1.05-mile section of the Fraser River downstream of Fraser Canyon in a public/private partnership with BLM and Granby Ranch.
- Continue to utilize the Grand County Stream Management Plan to identify and prioritize additional projects to improve the aquatic habitat in critical areas.
- Pursue grants to help fund Learning By Doing projects.
- Develop and implement an Aquatic Resource Monitoring Plan for 2020.
- Implement a 2020 Operations Plan to coordinate LBD partner operations.
- Pursue outreach opportunities to targeted water, conservation and public policy groups, as well as the Grand County community at large.