

**Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group  
Strategic Plan for 2017-2021**



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# Strategic Plan Executive Summary

## Our Vision

Ensuring a healthy and resilient Left Hand Creek Watershed for generations to come.

## Our Mission

The mission of the Left Hand Watershed Oversight Group is to assess, protect, and restore the quality of our watershed, and to serve as a hub for watershed issues through the fostering of stakeholder collaboration.

## Our Values

- **The Environment:** We value preservation of the watershed as a working and living resource and a place of beauty from the Headwaters in the Indian Peaks to the agricultural valley bottom to the urban areas in Longmont. When the watershed is healthy, people, wildlife, agriculture, businesses, communities and beyond all benefit.
- **Our Community:** We value all members of our community and beneficiaries of Left Hand watershed. We are a place where everyone is welcome and all voices will be heard.

## Our Programs, Goals and Initiatives

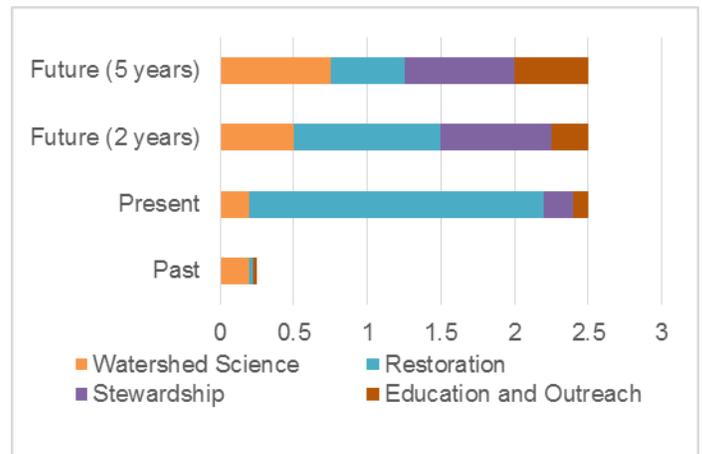
LWOG accomplishes its mission and goals through activities in 4 programs:

**Watershed Science:** We strive to become a model science-based watershed group, and develop a program and tools that are transferable throughout the state. We assess and monitor conditions in the watershed, in order to identify, prioritize, and facilitate the remediation of threats to water quality and watershed health and adapt to change over time.

**Restoration:** We address urgent, discrete, problems or issue areas that are identified through our Watershed Science Program, in order to enhance multiple benefits such as water quality, ecological function, flood resilience, agricultural efficiency, and the natural character of the watershed. We strive to implement projects that are transferable and repeatable across communities.

**Stewardship:** We promote a stewardship ethic that improves the overall quality and long-term resilience within the watershed. As “thought leaders” in the realm of stream stewardship, we aim to carryout creative, innovative, projects that have value and transferability throughout the state.

**Education and Outreach:** This program is an integral, innate, piece of our other programs. We facilitate stakeholder communication, and strive to serve the needs of landowners and other stakeholders, with strong public and private financial support.



**Figure 1. Staffing by Program:** Historically, LWOG primarily focused on the Watershed Science Program and mine related cleanup activities at a much lower staff capacity. Today, we primarily carryout activities related to work on flood recovery projects. In the future, we aim to have a more balanced approach among program activities.



# Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group Strategic Plan for 2017-2021

## Introduction

Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group (LWOG), a non-profit, non-governmental organization, recently underwent remarkable growth and transition as it took on a leadership role in undertaking flood recovery projects on private lands in the watershed, expanded its mission, board and staff, and further defined its programs. LWOG's strategic planning committee and Board of Directors developed this strategic plan to define the organizational priorities and strategies for the next 5 years, considering the recent organizational transformation and long-term sustainability goals of the organization. The plan is generally organized in the context of initiatives that will be undertaken for the four primary programs: Watershed Science, Restoration, Stewardship, and Education and Outreach.

## Background & History

### Our Watershed

The Left Hand Creek watershed is located in northwest Boulder County, Colorado, in the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, and drains an area of approximately 85 square miles. Left Hand Creek, James Creek, and Little James Creek are the primary streams in the watershed, producing an average total discharge of about 25,000 acre-feet per year. Left Hand Creek serves as a key water supply—and the only winter water source—for over 20,000 residential customers of the Left Hand Water District. In addition, the creek provides for other domestic uses elsewhere, agricultural irrigation, recreational opportunities, and serves as the backbone for diverse ecosystems. Diverse land use and land cover in the watershed include national forest land, residential, and recreational areas in the forested mountains and foothills in the western portion of the drainage, transitioning to agriculture and semi-urban areas in the eastern plains region of the watershed.

### Mining Legacy- Contamination

The Left Hand Creek watershed is located in the northern tip of the Colorado Mineral Belt. Beginning in the late 1850s, mineral extraction and processing occurred at hundreds of sites in the watershed. The most recent mining activity ceased in the mid-1990s, and no active mines or mills currently operate in the watershed. Significant trace metal contamination of the three primary streams resulted from these activities.

### EPA Steps In

In 1999 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approached the Towns of Ward and Jamestown about the possibility of large areas near or in the towns being added to the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) to fund necessary mine cleanup activities. Many area residents had serious concerns about having such a large area near their homes declared a Superfund site. To address this concern, the Boulder County Health Department created a community-based task force to explore alternatives to listing the large area. This Lefthand Watershed Task Force then organized meetings attended both by EPA officials and local citizens to discuss possible outcomes. In 2002 the Task Force submitted its report to the Boulder County Board of Health. By this time public opinion in Ward had changed, and, as recommended by the task force, the Captain Jack Mill site along Left Hand Creek in California Gulch just south of Ward was added to the NPL list in 2003. The Task Force recommended using other clean-up options to address mine sites near Jamestown and in other parts of the watershed.



## **LWOG Formed**

An important recommendation by the Task Force was for the formation of a continuing grass-roots watershed protection group, the Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group or LWOG. The group was chartered as a Colorado Nonprofit in 2004 and obtained tax-exempt 501(C)(3) status from the IRS in 2005. One of the first activities of LWOG was to develop a watershed plan to direct future efforts at cleaning up mine wastes. The watershed plan was published on August 10, 2005. LWOG then served as a hub for watershed issues with the primary function of bringing together stakeholders and funders to discuss and decide how to proceed with various projects identified in the watershed plan. Since then LWOG has expanded its focus to include fire and flood recovery, in addition to mine waste issues, as they pertain to water quality and watershed health.

## **The 2013 Flood**

Initial response to the September 2013 flood that impacted Left Hand Creek, along with several other South Platte tributaries along the Front Range, focused on issues of immediate health and safety such as rescue, transportation, stabilization of property, and clearing debris from the channel. Long-term restoration of these watersheds would require additional steps to be executed in a coordinated manner. In order to address this need the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) funded long-term master planning for the flooded creeks in 2014. These master plans would include actions to find an appropriate balance between water conveyance and energy dissipation, restore channels designed to handle both low and high flows, provide adequate protection against excessive erosion and sedimentation, and restore aquatic habitat.

The Left Hand Creek Watershed Master Plan, under the leadership of Boulder County, was completed in November 2014. The Left Hand Creek Watershed Master Plan recommends a number of flood mitigation and creek restoration projects that could be implemented with additional funding. Some of these projects have a watershed-wide scope, and others are specific to certain stream reaches. The community of stakeholders involved in providing input and expertise to the Left Hand Creek Watershed Master Plan chose LWOG to help coordinate the implementation of these projects. Accordingly, since 2015, LWOG has been leading this effort.

## **The Expansion of LWOG**

In early 2015, Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group expanded its Board to include additional stakeholders and residents, and began applying for grants to help fund hiring two full-time staff members, and started to plan and implement restoration projects, primarily those recommended in the 2014 Left Hand Creek Watershed Master Plan. These projects were designed to reduce future flood risks, stabilize heavily damaged streambeds and banks, restore the ecological health of the watershed and aesthetic character of the watershed, and improve human health and safety for landowners living along Left Hand Creek and its tributaries.

Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group has been remarkably successful in receiving funding and carrying out projects identified in the Watershed Master Plan. In 2017, LWOG secured over \$9,000,000 to implement over 12 flood recovery projects identified in the master plan, bringing significant stream recovery to private landowners throughout the watershed.

## **LWOG Vision**

The vision of Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group is “Ensuring a healthy and resilient Left Hand Creek Watershed for generations to come.”



## LWOG Mission

The mission of the Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group is to assess, protect, and restore the quality of our watershed, and to serve as a hub for watershed issues through the fostering of stakeholder collaboration.

## LWOG Values

The core values of Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group are preserving the environment and working together as a community of stakeholders.

- The Environment: We value preservation of the watershed as a working and living resource and a place of beauty from the pristine headwaters in the Indian Peaks to the agricultural valley bottom to urban and densely populated areas in Longmont. When the watershed is healthy, people, wildlife, agriculture, businesses, communities and beyond all benefit.
  - Science based approach: We rely on a science-based approach to assess and monitor the conditions of the watershed so we understand what we have and how to protect it and restore it when necessary.
  - Stewardship ethic: We strive to build a lasting stewardship ethic among the community and are committed to protecting the watershed.
  - Culture: We value the multi-use nature of our watershed, including the elements of Left Hand as a “working river” and the rich history including mining and recreational opportunities.
- Our Community: We value all members of our community and beneficiaries of Left Hand Watershed. We are a place where everyone is welcome and all voices will be heard.
  - Collaboration: We work together to accomplish our mission and implement projects. We facilitate open communication and cooperation between various stakeholders in order to find mutually beneficial solutions.
  - Sustainability: We endeavor to sustain the watershed and our organization, with strong financial and public support.

## Organization

As a non-governmental organization, LWOG is governed by a Board of Directors. As defined in our bylaws, the Board consists of a minimum of five and a maximum of thirteen members. The Board of Directors includes a representative from a number of entities/agencies. Such entity/agency representatives may be elected officials, employees, or appointees.

Additional members of the Board have either a demonstrated interest in watershed issues (especially agricultural, environmental and recreational), or are individuals with expertise that will assist and add value to the organization. Special consideration was given to residents who own property and reside in the watershed, with a goal of having a minimum of four residents that represent the Left Hand Creek’s diverse geography.

The Board also includes ex-officio non-voting Directors who are either local residents or representatives of various, local, federal and state entities/agencies that may have an interest in LWOG and its activities. These ex-officio members serve as liaisons between LWOG and their respective residential areas or entities/agencies.



The current LWOG Board members represent the following groups:

<b>Voting Board Members</b>	<b>Ex-Officio (Non-Voting) Board Members</b>
Landowners (5)	Landowner (2)
Boulder County	Trout Unlimited- Boulder Flycasters Chapter
City of Longmont	City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks
Left Hand Ditch Company	U.S. Forest Service
Left Hand Water District	
James Creek Watershed Initiative	
St. Vrain and Left Hand Water Conservancy District	
Town of Jamestown	
Town of Ward	

## Goals and Strategies

In pursuit of our mission, the Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group endeavors to:

- 1. Understand the State of the Watershed:** Assess and monitor conditions in the watershed, in order to identify, prioritize, and facilitate the remediation of threats to water quality and watershed health. *[Via our Watershed Science Program]*
- 2. Plan and Implement Projects:** Facilitate and lead watershed planning and implementation projects, consistent with applicable laws, property rights, water rights, local policies and procedures, management plans, and master plan guidance, in order to enhance water quality, ecological function, flood resilience, and the natural character of the watershed. *[Via our Restoration Program.]*
- 3. Promote a Strong Stewardship Ethic:** Communicate water quality and watershed-related information that increases the awareness of the public, property owners, stakeholders and local decision makers and promotes a stewardship ethic that improves the overall stream quality and long-term resilience within the watershed. *[Via our Stewardship Program.]*
- 4. Facilitate Stakeholder Collaboration:** Build and maintain an effective watershed protection program that fosters open communication and cooperation among stakeholders, and serves the needs of landowners and other stakeholders, with strong public and financial support. *[Via our Education and Outreach Program]*

## Initiatives

Our initiatives strive to achieve the stated goals above and are described in relation to our four programs below. One of our primary strategies to remain sustainable long-term is to characterize the relevance and importance of our work to the larger community. To achieve this, our program structure, projects, and activities are set up in a way that is meant to be transferable and repeatable across communities. In addition, we strive to maximize partnerships and the collaborative nature of our organization to benefit the community.

### Watershed Science Program

Within our Watershed Science Program, we are striving to become a model science-based watershed group that works to understand and address issues and threats in the watershed, and adapt to change over time. We are endeavoring to set up a program that can be replicated across other watersheds so that other communities are better able to detect issues, respond, and track progress over time. We work to leverage partnerships with local universities, Trout Unlimited (TU), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the Saint Vrain and Left Hand Water



Conservancy District (SVLHWD), the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment (CDPHE), Colorado Division of Reclamation and Mine Safety (DRMS), the Left Hand Water District (LHWD), and others to maximize the technical soundness of our approaches and the overall potential reach of our solutions. To effectively carry out this program, we plan to grow capacity in this program over the next five years. Within this program, we have several initiatives listed below.

Activity	Timeline	Estimated \$ Amounts	Notes
Update/Develop Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan	2017-2020	\$150,000-\$300,000	Update watershed-wide plan that ID's threats, issues and strategies to address them.
Develop Watershed Wide Monitoring Plan	2017-2020	\$30,000-\$50,000	ID key watershed-wide metrics to monitor to detect and respond to threats. Generally should come out of the development of watershed-wide management plan.
River Watch Monitoring	On-going	\$10,000-\$20,000	Continue River Watch Monitoring activities.
Restoration Project Monitoring	2017-2020 (and beyond as funding allows)	\$150,000-\$250,000	ID partnership opportunities with University and others to collect post-project data.
Participate in SVLHWCD Stream Management Planning Process	2018-2019	\$10,000-\$20,000	SVLHWCD leading process; LWOG may potentially lead portions of implementation.
Assessment and Restoration of Legacy Mining Sites	On-going	\$5,000-\$10,000	ID and apply for grant opportunities in cooperation with CDPHE, DRMS and others.
Source Water Protection & Watershed Health Activities	2017-2021	\$5,000-\$10,000	ID and apply for grant opportunities in cooperation with LHWD, USFS and others.
Fee for Service Projects	2017-2021	\$5,000-\$30,000	Continue partnerships with LHWD, USFS, TU, and others to assist with monitoring activities.

### Restoration Program

Our Restoration Program has been a significant focus of our activities as an organization as we led implementation of stream recovery projects on private lands in the watershed. In the next two years, this program will continue to be a primary focus of our organization since flood recovery work is still on-going. As we move into 2020, this program will likely have a more balanced focus compared to other programs, and we will primarily work to address urgent, discrete, problem or issue areas that are identified through our Watershed Science Program. In addition, we are striving to develop scale-able and repeatable projects, set in an adaptive management context, such that we are able to make contributions to the restoration community beyond our watershed boundaries. Further, once the St. Vrain and Left Hand Water Conservancy District Stream Management Plan is complete, LWOG may take on a larger role of implementing projects recommended in the planning process for Left Hand Watershed. Through all of these projects and activities we strive to implement on-the-ground solutions that demonstrate strategies that may be applicable in other watersheds.



Project	Timeline	\$ Amount	Notes
<a href="#">Reach 3B Design-Build</a>	June 2016-July 2017	\$ 298,739	Completed July 2017
<a href="#">NRCS EWP Plains Reach Projects</a> (5 Projects)	January-November 2017	\$2,774,068	Completed Nov. 2017
<a href="#">NRCS EWP Foothills Reach Projects</a> (4 Projects)	January-November 2017	\$4,271,123	Completed Nov. 2017
<a href="#">63<sup>rd</sup> Street Extension Design-Build Project</a>	June 2017-July 2018	\$450,000	Currently underway
Legacy Project: Design-Build Projects Upper Left Hand (9 Projects)	January 2018-July 2019	\$1,999,000	Grant Awarded.
Stream Management Plan Implementation	2019-2021	\$10,000-\$1,000,000	Potential future projects.
Implement additional urgent need projects as identified through update of comprehensive management plan.	2018-2021	\$10,000-\$1,000,000	Aim for repeatable, transferable demonstration projects.

Notes: See <https://lwog.org/programs/restoration/> for addition information including project updates, maps, and before and after photos of our projects.

### Stewardship Program

Our Stewardship Program promotes a stewardship ethic that improves the overall quality and long-term resilience of the watershed. We've been steadily growing capacity in this program through the development of a landowner Stewardship Handbook and a recent grant award to develop a Citizen Science program. In the next five years, this program will continue to be a large focus of our organization, as we work to maintain and protect the investment made in the watershed through numerous restoration projects. On-going stewardship of these project reaches will be necessary to maintain the benefits of the projects and ensure the sites remain successful well into the future. Engaging with the community on these activities is an essential component to ensure we continue to build a community of Stream Stewards. Due to the large extent of privately owned property along the river corridor, the greatest impact we can have on improving overall health and resilience of the watershed is by working with and educating private landowners. We will also be looking for opportunities to expand our stewardship services into upland areas, and strive for a holistic watershed-wide community of stewards. As "thought leaders" in the realm of stream stewardship, we aim to carryout creative, innovative, projects that have value and transferability throughout the state.

Project	Timeline	\$ Amount	Notes
<a href="#">Landowner Stream Stewardship Handbook</a>	December 2017	\$200,000	Completed in November 2017.
Citizen Science Program Development	December 2018	\$46,500	Engage community in Citizen Science and understanding why stewardship is necessary.
Legacy Project- Stewardship Project Implementation	2018 & 2019	\$160,000	Maintenance and Monitoring of project areas-year 1 & 2 post project.
Adaptive Management of Project Sites (Stewardship Projects)	2020	\$150,000-\$250,000	Maintenance and Monitoring of project areas-year 3 post project.
Fee for Service Projects/ Sponsored Stewardship Projects	July 2018-2020	\$5,000-\$30,000	Fee for service or Sponsored projects for private landowners or partner groups.
Watershed-Wide Stewardship Activities	2019-2021	\$5,000-\$500,000	ID opportunities to support stewardship activities throughout watershed.



**Education & Outreach**

Our Outreach and Education Program is an integral, innate, piece to all other programs. Under this program, we will continue to facilitate stakeholder communication, and strive to serve the needs of landowners and other stakeholders, with strong public and financial support. In the next five years, we aim to increase capacity in this area to maximize benefits to all other programs and the community at large. Specifically, we would like to increase awareness within the community of the resources and benefits Lefthand Watershed Oversight Group brings to the community. Opportunities include increasing LWOG’s presence within the community through events, increasing opportunities for engagement and involvement with youth and adults, adding educational and informational signage throughout the watershed, and maximizing partnerships with other organizations.

<b>Project/Activity</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>\$ Amount</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Grow membership and interest to ensure all stakeholders are at the table.	2017-2021	\$10,000-\$20,000	Farms & ranches, water lawyers, reservoir companies, water congress, University partnerships, other landowner groups and HOAs.
Continue to distribute Watershed-Relevant Information	2017-2021	\$5,000-\$15,000	Support partner organizations by helping distribute information and provide resources on our website. Watershed-wide mailers to increase reach.
Adult Outreach and Education Events	2017-2021	\$5,000-\$30,000	Work in concert with other programs.
K-12 Outreach & Education	2017-2021	\$5,000-\$30,000	Initiate project/program that brings children to the outdoors to assist in stewardship and citizen science activities and increases awareness of watershed issues.
Place Educational Signage at key locations	2017-2021	\$5,000-\$500,000	Consider partnerships with public entities to place signage in public areas.
Fee for Service-Assist partners with outreach activities	2017-2021	\$5,000-\$30,000	Work with Boulder County, City of Longmont, others on outreach activities as needed.
Host “friendraiser” type events to gain support & interest of community.	2017-2021	\$5,000-\$30,000	E.g. paddle boarding at a reservoir, cycling event, guided hikes, pint nights, evening lectures, etc.
Implement fundraising plan to gain financial support from diverse sources, year after year.	2017-2021	\$20,000-\$40,000	Continue pursuing grants, corporate sponsorships, individual donations, partner organization contributions, foundations, and more.

**Summary**

This plan provides strategies for achieving our goals over the next five years and remaining sustainable in the future. At the end of the five year period, we expect to have a more balanced focus between the four program activities and have sufficient capacity to carry out our mission of protecting and restoring Left Hand Creek Watershed for generations to come.