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Funding for WRDS and the creation of this electronic document was provided by the Wyoming Water Development Commission
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MEDICINE BOW RIVER WATERSHED STUDY

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

Topical Report RSI-2592

prepared for

Wyoming Water Development Commission
6920 Yellowtail Road
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002

February 2016

RESPEC

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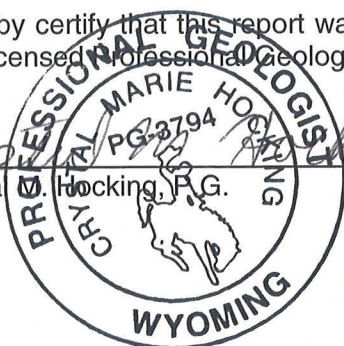
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I hereby certify that this report was prepared by us or under our direct supervision and that we are duly licensed Professional Geologists and Engineers under the laws of the state of Wyoming


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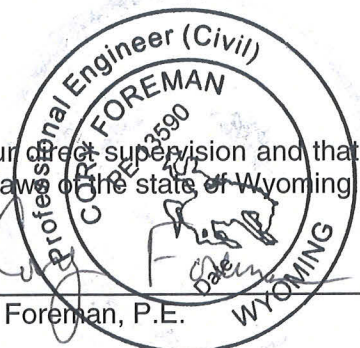

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In 2013, the Medicine Bow Conservation District (MBCD) requested that the Wyoming Water Development Commission (WWDC) conduct a comprehensive study of the Medicine Bow River Watershed and its water resources. The local sponsors requested that the Level I watershed study evaluate watershed function; assess wetland and riparian conditions; develop geomorphic classifications; and identify resource concerns and water-development opportunities on irrigated lands, rangelands, wetlands, and streams. In 2014, the WWDC approved funding for the watershed study and then contracted with RESPEC and its subconsultant, Anderson Consulting Engineers, Inc. (ACE), to provide technical and professional services for the Medicine Bow River Watershed Study, Level I in June 2014.

The Medicine Bow River Watershed Study is a comprehensive evaluation and an initial inventory of the water and land resources within the study area. This Level I study provides important information that the MBCD (the study's local sponsor); the WWDC (the study's sponsor); and neighboring conservation districts, including the Laramie Rivers Natural Resource District (LRCD), Converse County Conservation District (CCCD), Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District (SERCD), and Natrona County Conservation District (NCCD), could use in developing water resources and implementing conservation practices that address water- and land-resource concerns within the study area. This watershed study includes in-depth descriptions about needed water-development projects that could provide economic, ecological, and social benefits to the state of Wyoming and its citizens. The terms "watershed" and "study area" are used interchangeably throughout this report.

The intent of this report, accompanied by the study's digital library and Geographic Information System (GIS) geodatabase, is to provide the results of the Medicine Bow River Watershed Study. This Level I watershed study included reviewing previously conducted work contained in numerous databases, studies, and reports regarding the natural resources within the study area. Additionally, the information reviewed and determined to be relevant to the study's purpose was compiled into a "digital library" and a GIS dataset. Information in the digital library was combined with the data collected during the inventory effort and used to generate proposed conceptual alternatives outlined in Chapter 4.0, Medicine Bow River Watershed Management and Rehabilitation Plan, of this report.

1.2 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this Level I watershed study was to combine the available data and information with the study-generated inventory data to develop a comprehensive Watershed

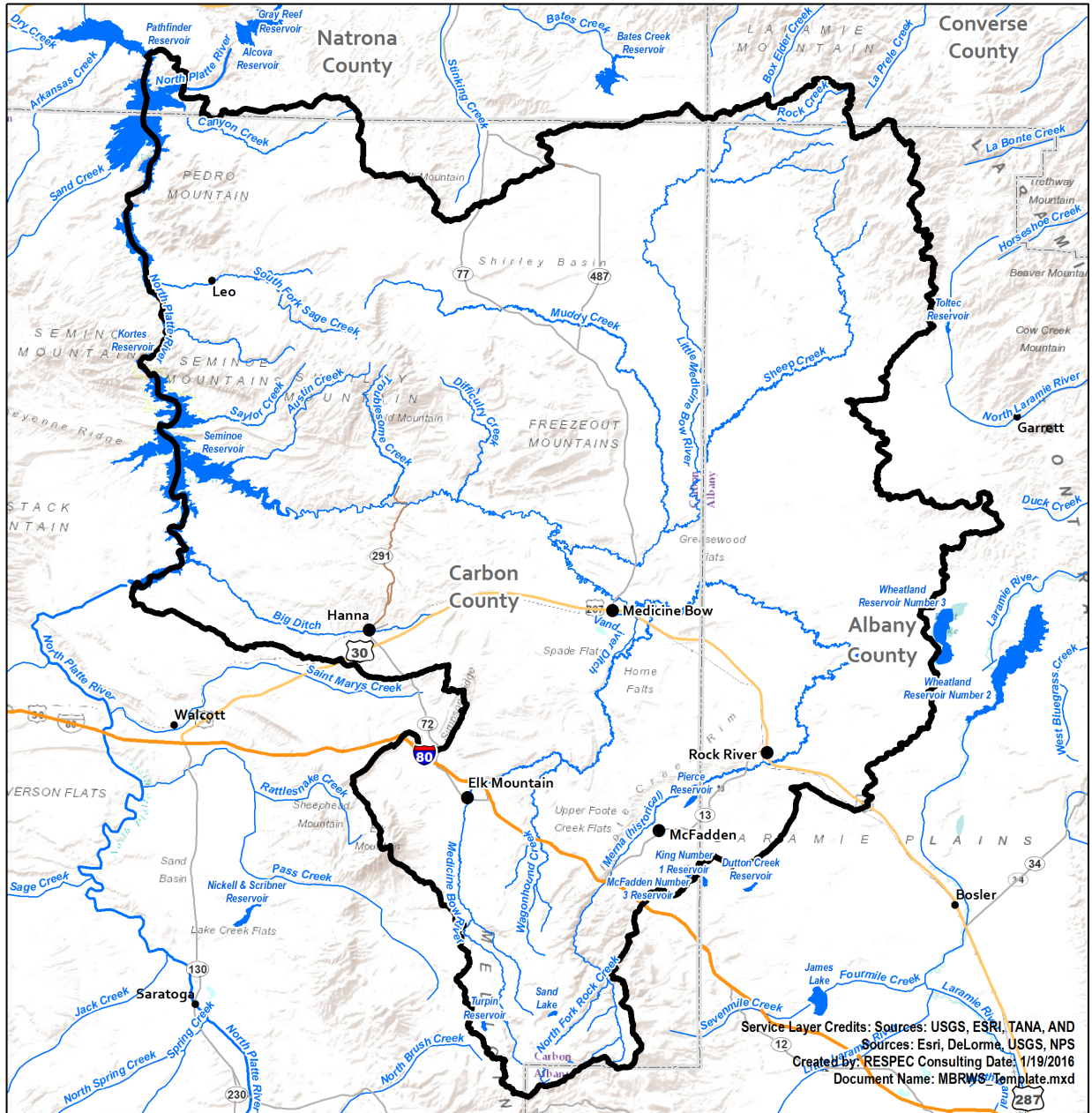
Management and Rehabilitation Plan that outlines proposed and potential water-development opportunities. To accomplish this effort, the following objectives were completed:

- Foster communication among residents and landowners, the local sponsors (MBCD, LRCD, CCCD, SERCD, and NCCD), and the WWDC.
- Solicit public participation in the watershed study.
- Inventory and evaluate the watershed with emphasis on surface-water quantity and quality in addition to upland and riparian conditions.
- Perform a geomorphic classification of the major tributaries in the study area to identify unstable reaches and improvement options to restore channel stability.
- Assess existing irrigation systems and generate rehabilitation alternatives for the irrigators participating in the study.
- Evaluate existing surface-water features, storage requirements, and potential opportunities to improve water availability for livestock and wildlife.
- Prepare a Watershed Management and Rehabilitation Plan that includes problem areas and proposes improvement alternatives within the watershed.
- Identify permits, easements, and clearances necessary for plan implementation.
- Estimate costs for proposed improvement alternatives and potential projects and identify potential sources of funding.

1.3 STUDY AREA

The study area for the Medicine Bow River Watershed, as shown in Figure 1.1, encompasses the drainage area for the Medicine Bow River beginning at the headwaters of the river approximately 10 miles northwest of Centennial and flowing generally north through the town of Medicine Bow where it turns generally west until it flows into Seminoe Reservoir. The headwaters of the Little Medicine Bow River are in the northeast corner of the study area approximately 33 miles southwest of Douglas. The Little Medicine Bow River flows generally south-southwest until it enters the Medicine Bow River approximately 7 miles northwest of the town of Medicine Bow. Also included in the study area are streams that flow and lands that drain to Seminoe Reservoir, Pathfinder Reservoir, and the area east of the North Platte River between those reservoirs.

The study area covers approximately 3,073 square miles (or 1,966,930 acres) in southeast Wyoming. The watershed is situated within Carbon County (70.5 percent) and Albany County (27.9 percent) with small portions included in Natrona County (0.9 percent) and Converse County (0.7 percent). The cities, towns, and communities of Elk Mountain, Hanna, Leo, McFadden, Medicine Bow, and Rock River lie within the watershed boundary.



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 Sources: Esri, DeLorme, USGS, NPS
 Created by: RESPEC Consulting Date: 1/19/2016
 Document Name: MBRWS_Template.mxd

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| <p>Legend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level I Watershed Cities and Towns Counties North Platte River Major Tributaries Other Streams Reservoirs | <p>N</p> <p>Miles</p> <p>0 10 20</p> | |
| | | |

Figure 1.1. Medicine Bow River Level I Watershed Study Area.

The watershed is approximately 80 miles north-south and 66 miles east-west and is bounded on the north by the Middle North Platte-Casper drainage. The study area is bounded on the northwest by the North Platte River and on the southwest by the Upper North Platte drainage. On the southeast, east, and northeast, the study area boundary is the Upper Laramie drainage, the Lower Laramie drainage, and the Glendo Reservoir drainage, respectively.

The Medicine Bow River and its major tributaries, Little Medicine Bow River and Rock Creek, are located within the study area. Many other tributaries flow to the Medicine Bow River within the watershed. Approximately 7,300 stream miles are located within the watershed with approximately 1,490 stream miles classified as perennial. The watershed boundary also contains some tributaries that do not flow into the Medicine Bow River but, instead, flow into North Platte River, Pathfinder Reservoir, and Seminoe Reservoir. These tributaries include Austin Creek, Big Ditch, Canyon Creek, Lost Creek, Sage Creek, and Saylor Creek.

1.4 WATERSHED INVENTORY

The objective of the inventory was to gather, review, and compile information, which included geology, hydrology, soils, climate, plants, wildlife habitat, infrastructure, irrigation, stream conditions, and upland conditions, to describe problems and identify water-development opportunities and improvements within the watershed. The spatial data gathered during the study were mainly obtained from Albany, Carbon, Converse, and Natrona Counties; the Wyoming State Engineer's Office (SEO); WWDC; Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (WOGCC); Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ); Wyoming Geographic Information Science Center (WyGISC); Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD); U.S. Department of the Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Forest Service (USFS); U.S. Department of the Interior's U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR); Bureau of Land Management (BLM); and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The collected data was compiled into a GIS, which can be used to complete permits, assessments, applications, and maps.

In addition to collecting available geospatial data and reports pertaining to the study area, landowners interested in participating in the watershed study contacted the consultant, MBCD, LRCD, NCCD, Wyoming Water Development Office (WWDO), or NRCS staff. Individual meetings were then scheduled at landowners' properties where discussions focused on land- and water-resource concerns. During these property visits, initial planning and conceptual project designs were discussed for upland livestock/wildlife and irrigation water improvements. RESPEC and ACE staff met with 12 landowners during 16 field visits and met with 8 landowners during 2 open houses.

Field inventory efforts were often conducted in coordination with scoping meetings, open houses, MBCD board meetings, and landowner visits. Field activities focused on irrigation inventory, livestock/wildlife water opportunities, riparian and stream-channel conditions, dam

and reservoir assessment, and hydrologic investigations. Throughout the watershed study, local ranchers, irrigators, and residents who invited the study team to visit their properties and discuss issues and concerns demonstrated extensive knowledge and valuable insight about the watershed. Because of the willingness of landowners to share information, insight, and direction, the study team was able to incorporate this knowledge and experience into the study and provide a more effective evaluation of the watershed.

1.5 WATERSHED MANAGEMENT AND REHABILITATION PLAN

The Watershed Management and Rehabilitation Plan was developed using information from the inventory and provides recommendations for improvements for the following:

- Irrigation system rehabilitation components
- Livestock/wildlife upland watering opportunities
- Grazing management opportunities
- Storage opportunities
- Stream-channel condition and stability
- Wetland enhancement opportunities
- Other watershed management opportunities.

Table 1.1 lists the irrigation system rehabilitation components of the plan. Table 1.2 presents the livestock/wildlife upland watering components. Costs were estimated for the conceptual proposed projects by using the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) cost data, costs for similar projects, and manufacturers' and vendors' advertised product prices. Costs for potential storage alternatives were estimated using the values previously reported for these alternatives, which represent 2006 dollars and were not adjusted for this study.

1.6 PERMITS

Information was provided regarding clearances, environmental reviews, agency coordination, and determination of potential impacts that may be necessary in implementing the proposed projects. Some projects involve federal lands and funding that would be subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other federal regulations. State regulatory approval regarding proposed projects may also be applicable. Local zoning ordinances, building and floodplain permits, and road or utility right-of-way may be required within incorporated towns, cities, and counties or from irrigation districts, road districts, and utility or energy entities.

Table 1.1. Estimated Costs Associated With Each of the Irrigation Rehabilitation Proposed Projects and Components of the Watershed Management Plan

| Item Number | Priority | Pipeline | Structure for Water Control | Regulating Reservoir | Total Project Costs (\$) |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| I-01 | 4 | | 1 | | 221,135 |
| I-02 | 4 | 1,700 | 1 | | 271,855 |
| I-03 | 4 | 230 | 2 | | 64,351 |
| I-04 | 4 | 1,260 | 2 | | 81,543 |
| I-05 | 4 | 7,500 | 1 | | 160,440 |
| I-06 | 4 | 6,700 | 1 | | 147,087 |
| I-07 | 4 | 13,500 | 1 | 1 | 310,621 |
| I-08 | 4 | 4,300 | 1 | | 107,028 |
| I-09 | 4 | 4,100 | 1 | | 103,690 |
| I-10 | 4 | 3,800 | 1 | | 98,682 |
| I-11 | 4 | 2,600 | 1 | 1 | 128,687 |
| I-12 | 4 | 10,100 | 1 | | 203,837 |
| I-13 | 4 | 4,900 | 1 | 1 | 167,076 |
| I-14 | 4 | 9,200 | 1 | | 188,815 |
| I-15 | 4 | 2,000 | 1 | 1 | 118,672 |
| I-16 | 4 | 3,500 | 1 | | 90,675 |
| I-17 | 4 | | 1 | | 32,256 |
| I-18 | 4 | | 1 | | 32,256 |
| I-19 | 4 | | 1 | | 32,256 |
| I-20 | 4 | | 1 | | 32,256 |
| I-21 | 4 | | 1 | | 32,256 |
| I-22 | 4 | | 1 | | 141,090 |
| I-23 | 4 | | 1 | | 32,256 |
| I-24 | 4 | | 1 | | 32,256 |
| I-25 | 4 | | 1 | | 32,256 |

Table 1.2. Estimated Costs Associated With Each of the Livestock/Wildlife Water Proposed Projects of the Watershed Management Plan

| Item Number | Project Name | Description | Priority | Total Project Costs (\$) |
|--------------------|------------------------|--|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| LW-01 | Willow Springs | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 116,928 |
| LW-01A | Willow Springs South | Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 182,414 |
| LW-01B | Willow Springs West | Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 189,361 |
| LW-02 | Windmill Well | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 150,709 |
| LW-03 | Roy #1 | Well Rehabilitation Project | 1 | 91,761 |
| LW-03A | Roy #1 | Well Rehabilitation Project | 1 | 88,390 |
| LW-04 | Little Medicine Bow | Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 127,178 |
| LW-05 | Calvert | Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 78,650 |
| LW-06 | Amerada #1 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 184,832 |
| LW-07 | Plank Place | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 95,303 |
| LW-08 | Reservoir Pasture | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 95,644 |
| LW-09 | Towers | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 42,076 |
| LW-10 | Spring Creek | Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 60,690 |
| LW-11 | Amphitheater | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 120,367 |
| LW-12 | Diamond Dome | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 53,144 |
| LW-13 | Foote Creek | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 3 | 54,472 |
| LW-14 | Roy #3 | Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 72,725 |
| LW-15 | Plains #3 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 160,926 |
| LW-17 | County Line | Stock Reservoir Rehabilitation Project | 3 | 34,244 |
| LW-18 | County Line | Spring Development and Tank Project | 1 | 65,812 |
| LW-19 | Gibson Eaton | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 190,110 |
| LW-20 | Higginson | Spring Development and Tank Project | 1 | 54,778 |
| LW-21 | Kamp Place | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 90,808 |
| LW-22 | Kamp Well #1 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 82,567 |
| LW-23 | North Fork | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 106,439 |
| LW-24 | Section 32 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 124,351 |
| LW-25 | Sims #1 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 57,060 |
| LW-26 | Sims #2 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 101,331 |
| LW-27 | Sims #5 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 57,060 |
| LW-27 | Sims #4 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 57,060 |
| LW-28 | Squaw Creek #3 | Well, Pipeline and Tank Project | 1 | 164,706 |
| LW-29 | Elk Mountain Reservoir | Stock Reservoir Rehabilitation Project | 1 | 34,244 |

1.7 FUNDING

Funding for the opportunities in the Watershed Management and Rehabilitation Plan are dependent on local coordination and voluntary cooperation between landowners, managers, irrigators, organizations, and agencies in addressing the land- and water-resource concerns. The MBCD, LRCO, CCCD, SERCO, or NCCO could serve as a sponsor for those funding sources requiring a sponsoring entity. For instance, the WWDC's Small Water Project Program (SWPP) funds sponsored projects that provide multiple benefits where the total project costs (including construction, permitting, construction engineering, and land procurement) are less than \$135,000 or where WWDC's maximum financial contribution is 50 percent of project costs or \$35,000, whichever is less.

By combining funding from additional sources (i.e., NRCS Farmbill or USBR WaterSMART funding), total costs could be potentially reduced for the participants. Additionally, state and federal agencies, including but not limited to the WGFD, BLM, USFS, USBR, and NRCS, have conservation programs and could potentially assist with project implementation. More information about funding projects is available in the WWDC's Water Management and Conservation Assistance Programs Directory, which is an overview of local, state, and federal programs (<http://wwdc.state.wy.us/wconsprog/2014WtrMgntConsDirectory.html>).

1.8 CONCLUSIONS

The following sections describe the inventory efforts, proposed projects, opportunities, and recommendations that were developed as part of the Watershed Management and Rehabilitation Plan.

1.8.1 Irrigation System Components

- Proposed projects and associated components for issues identified during field inventories for irrigation system infrastructure were completed for 25 irrigation systems.
- Most of the structures inventoried and evaluated during the study require rehabilitation efforts to reduce seepage and conserve water; however, common infrastructure needs are more individual in nature within the watershed.
- Recommended improvements to existing irrigation systems mainly involve replacing and/or rehabilitating existing but weakened diversion and headgate structures along with replacing ditches with pipelines to reduce conveyance losses.
- The study participants identified rehabilitating their diversion and headgate structures as a priority while the ditch-to-pipeline conceptual project components were mainly included for consideration of potential water conservation planning opportunities.
- Most of the proposed irrigation system projects would require minor involvement or permitting from regulatory agencies to be completed. However, work involving stream-channel work such as on Rock Creek would require consultation with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE).

1.8.2 Livestock/Wildlife Upland Watering Opportunities

- Livestock grazing and ranching occurs throughout the watershed with other land uses including mining, wind power, oil and gas production, wildlife habitat, and recreation.
- Opportunities to improve range and riparian conditions require installing and operating well-distributed, reliable water sources and watering facilities for livestock and wildlife.
- The study area contains 139 BLM grazing allotments that contain 558,790 acres of federal rangeland and 32,860 acres of forestland along with 12 USFS grazing allotments that encompass 18,220 rangeland acres and 76,360 acres of forestland.
- Because federal grazing allotments often encompass state and private lands, coordination with the BLM and the USFS regarding grazing allotment management is necessary and requires more involvement in developing proposed livestock/wildlife water supply projects beyond the conceptual-level projects included within the study report.
- Because of the existing regulatory environment and involvement of third-party interests, the proposed projects with portions of federal lands could be difficult and require additional review and planning efforts.
- Several proposed projects and pipeline components could be rerouted or redesigned to involve only private or state land; these might result in increased materials and construction costs but could avoid project delays and permitting issues.
- Thirty-two potential livestock/wildlife water projects were identified for development, which resulted from an effort that evaluated available water sources in coordination with participating landowners and allotment permittees.
- Conceptual project plans and component descriptions along with associated cost estimates were calculated for each of the proposed projects. The primary components included wells, solar pumps, buried pipelines, and stock/storage tanks, which would require additional final planning, design, and permitting completed before construction.
- The proposed projects and components would need to be installed, operated, and maintained by the landowner or manager in accordance with current standards and specifications to realize the expected benefits to the project area and the watershed.

1.8.3 Grazing Management Opportunities

- Reliable water supply projects need to be developed and constructed in areas with inadequate water sources before grazing management alternatives could be made.
- Developing reliable water sources and associated watering facilities can aid in distribution, timing, and frequency of grazing animals. However, additional measures such as cross fencing, low-stress herding, mineral/salting, and grazing density should be evaluated as part of the site-specific, grazing management inventory and plan.

- Available tools such as the ecological site description (ESD) and the State and Transition Model (STM) can be used by landowners and managers so that they can be aware of the growth potential of preferred vegetation and predicted responses on a specific range site.

1.8.4 Surface-Water Storage Opportunities

- Institutional issues and constraints related to the 2001 Modified Decree and/or the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program limit the opportunity to create new reservoirs or increase existing reservoirs through enlargement within the watershed.
- Storage evaluations focused on existing stock pond/reservoir facilities and potential upland water storage facilities less than 20 acre-feet that were identified by study participants where conditions limited the ability to store water within the study area.
- During the scoping meetings, only one project, Bosler Reservoir (Diamond Lake), was suggested by a water user as a potential storage opportunity.
- Inquiry into the Bosler Reservoir alternative found that water delivery via the King Canyon Canal (Canon Ditch) to the reservoir and water released from the reservoir to irrigated lands are both problematic and would require further investigation in the feasibility of water delivery and acquisition of water rights for this opportunity.

1.8.5 Channel Stability

- Stream channels on the Little Medicine Bow River near the Shirley Basin Mine Land Reclamation Project (Wyoming Abandoned Mine Lands [AML] 13) and on Rock Creek should receive additional investigation of stabilization measures because impacts are affecting multiple landowners, diversion and headgate structures, and other infrastructure facilities.
- Site-specific improvements should be developed to alleviate the channel impairments and restore riparian/wetland function as part of the Watershed Management and Rehabilitation Plan.

1.8.6 Other Upland Management Opportunities

- Noxious weed and invasive species control used to assist range and forest management according to the STMs.

1.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Several proposed conceptual projects, identified opportunities, suggested alternatives, and initial conclusions have been presented and discussed within this report. The recommendations listed below are also included for consideration:

- Several irrigation system rehabilitation projects and livestock/wildlife water projects could be eligible to apply for funding through the WWDC's Small Water Project Program (SWPP).
- Priority projects should be reviewed and selected, and components should be implemented when the necessary technical and financial requirements are determined.
- Landowners seeking to participate in the SWPP should consult and coordinate with the MBCD, LRCO, and/or SERCO, which are eligible sponsors of SWPP applications and project agreements.
- Proposed project narratives, conceptual plans, and cost estimates could be used by local sponsors in developing SWPP applications. Preliminary project benefits were included to also assist in submitting program applications.
- Several of the proposed projects require additional planning work that could include site-specific engineering, cultural resource, geologic, groundwater, wetland, and construction investigations and surveys.
- Some of the irrigation projects, such as the Dry Creek Diversion and Vandiver Ditch, that involve costly repairs or replacing existing facilities would not be eligible for funding through the SWPP; consequently, landowners and local sponsors should consider district formation (where applicable) and applying to the WWDC for Level II evaluation and potential project funding:
- Although the study effort attempted to address all of the participants' requests for assistance, more projects from additional landowners developed after the study was completed. These projects are also eligible to apply for SWPP funding because they are located within the study area but will need additional planning assistance.
- The study's GIS and digital library should be used as a tool in planning and developing projects and should be updated as necessary from available information sources.
- Innovative strategies for coordinated project funding and financing involving private, local, state, and federal sources such as current partnership efforts between the MBCD, LRCO, SERCO, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Nature Conservancy should be continued in association with WWDC programs to address resource concerns within the watershed.
- A coordinated approach based on local, collaborative endeavors, which integrates more than one watershed issue that result in achieving multiple benefits, is essential.