



## COLORADO RIVER DISTRICT

PROTECTING WESTERN COLORADO WATER SINCE 1937

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 26, 2025

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### **Strategic water releases from Elkhead Reservoir help mitigate drought impacts in lower Yampa River Valley**

**CRAIG, Colo.** — On July 25, the Colorado River District, in partnership with the Colorado Water Trust and the Yampa River Fund, began releasing water from Elkhead Reservoir to help mitigate the impacts of low streamflow in the Yampa River Valley. Since then, daily releases have varied between 20 and 40 cubic feet per second and, as of Aug. 25, totaled more than 1,700 acre-feet. These releases are part of the Yampa River Reservoir Release Program, a 2,000 AF pool, which began in 2021 with funding from the Colorado River District's Community Funding Partnership and is designed to ease the pressure of drought on agricultural producers in the region and support a healthier environment.

"This program has allowed us to prevent an extended call on the river this summer," said **Hunter Causey, Colorado River District Chief Engineer**. "Without releases from Elkhead, the Yampa River would have been completely dry at times below Maybell. This is how we can help local agricultural producers do what they do best which is produce the food and fiber we all depend on."

"The water from these releases allowed me to continue irrigating, and without it, I might not have been able to bring in a hay crop at all. I think that goes for a lot of other producers along the Yampa," said **Mike Camblin, owner of Camblin Livestock** near Maybell. "We have a really good group of people in this valley who are able to work on this together, and it's a relationship we need to continue."

Drought conditions throughout the summer intensified dramatically, diminishing streamflow and increasing water temperatures. On Thursday, July 24, the Colorado Division of Water Resources Division 6 Engineer put a call on the Yampa River to meet the downstream needs of senior water rights holders. While the call was removed on Tuesday, July 30, this is the earliest call experienced by the Yampa River, and one of only four in its history. Delaying the call for several weeks allows producers to continue to irrigate during a critical period of crop finishing.

"This has been a particularly dry year in the Yampa Basin, and the Elkhead Reservoir Release Program has done exactly what we hoped it would," said **Blake Mamich, Programs Director for the Colorado Water Trust**. "Together with the River District, and by closely coordinating with water users and stakeholders, we've been able to support river habitat and consumptive users by delaying a call on the river by over a month."

Along with the releases from the 2000-acre-foot pool in Elkhead, water from Stagecoach Reservoir near Oak Creek is also being released to improve ecosystem health and support the summer recreational economy of Steamboat Springs. These two small, high elevation storage buckets are operated in close coordination with the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program and have become essential to stream health throughout the Yampa River basin, especially in dry years.

The hydrology of the Yampa River is complex, depending on snowmelt from the Flattop Mountains and Gore Range, before descending quickly to the high desert near the border with Utah. Flows from the Yampa River continue through stretches designated as critical habitat for the four endangered fish species and terminate into the Green River in Dinosaur National Monument.

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