

# New water plant planned near Colona

By Kylea Henseler  
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Project 7 Water Authority, which serves 60,000 water users in Ouray, Montrose and Delta counties, aims to build a new water treatment facility south of Colona by 2026 that would treat water from Ridgway Reservoir.

The organization received a \$47,600 grant last month from the Colorado River District for the project, part of its Regional Water Supply and Resiliency Program, intended to help it develop a competitive application for Infrastructure Act funds.

Project 7 serves Tri-County Water Conservancy District, which includes parts of unincorporated Ouray County – northern Log Hill, Pleasant Valley and Idlewild – as well as the Menoken and Chipeta water districts and the municipalities of Montrose, Delta and Olathe. Tri-County serves 906 taps in Ouray County, according to Miles Graham, a spokesperson for Project 7's Resiliency Team. He said this number is multiplied by 2.5 to report the total population served to the Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment,

## Project 7 secures grant to build second treatment facility

though the exact number of users is hard to estimate.

Graham said Tri-County also has connections with the Town of Ridgway and Dallas Creek Water Company, and Project 7 is an emergency backup supplier for communities served by those entities if needed.

The water authority relies on one water treatment plant in Montrose County, which gets more than 95% of its water from Blue Mesa Reservoir near Gunnison.

This sole-source reliance is the major reason for the push toward a second treatment facility, Graham said.

"When Project 7 was founded back in the '70s, it was founded because all of the region's infrastructure was aging," he said. "And by working together and sharing infrastructure, we were able to create a really secure water system. And so this project is the next generation trying to do the same thing."

As the West faces an ongoing megadrought, the threat of an emergency such as a wildfire that could damage the single plant's ability to serve its customers is always looming, he said.

The new plant would be capable of treating around 6 million gallons of water per day, enough to meet the indoor water needs of Project 7's customers, and built so this capacity can be expanded if needed. Graham said it's intended primarily as a backup to the main plant, which treats almost 30 million gallons per day. However, he said the new plant will operate at a limited capacity to ensure its water quality is the same as the main facility's, and this water will likely be used to supply Tri-County Water Conservancy District customers, whose water currently needs to be pumped uphill from the Montrose plant.

While Project 7 plans to apply for state and federal dollars, including Infrastructure Act funds, to complete the project, users could also see some rate increases over the next few years as the group increases the price it charges water providers.

"It is anticipated that the price Project 7 charges for

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## County approves housing funding

By Liz Teitz  
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The Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to approve a memorandum of understanding to grant \$500,000 to Ouray Homes, LLC and a letter of support promising \$100,000 to the Home Trust of Ouray County, both for affordable housing projects in Ouray.

Ouray Homes, LLC plans to build up to 80 homes over two phases on a nine-acre parcel north of the former Biota building. The deed-restricted homes will be sold to qualified buyers, with eligibility based on income and other factors.

Paul Major, the former Telluride Foundation CEO who is leading the project, asked the board to commit half a million dollars to the project, which he said will be used to help pay off a \$1.9 million loan from the Department of Local Affairs to purchase the property. The money

will also help the organization in seeking other funding, Major said.

Ouray County will have the first right of refusal to purchase up to 10 homes, or to designate qualified county employees to purchase them. If the county doesn't exercise its right on all 10 units, the right can be transferred to the city of Ouray or the Ouray School District and their employees.

The county will provide the funding in the first quarter of 2023, according to the MOU, but the grant is contingent on the city of Ouray approving the preliminary plan and rezoning for the site, as well as receiving other funding from the State Housing Board.

The \$100,000 committed to the Home Trust of Ouray County is also contingent on the nonprofit receiving funding through the state's Affordable Housing Development Incentives Grant Program. Home Trust Executive Director Andrea

Sokolowski is working with the city to apply for the funding, which can only be awarded to local governments. In order to qualify for the grant money, which will be used for infrastructure for the Home Trust's proposed Oak Street rental project, the organization must have a match of 20% of its project cost. The county's commitment of \$100,000, in addition to other grant and loan funding, will meet that threshold. Sokolowski said awards for the grant funding are currently expected to be announced in January.

Commissioners previously discussed both requests extensively, before approving the funding commitments Tuesday.

Liz Teitz is a journalist with Report for America, a national service program which places reporters in underserved areas. You can support her work with a tax-deductible donation. Email erin@ouraynews.com for more information.

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# Get in the holiday spirit with Noel Night, Yule Celebration

By Mike Wiggins  
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Santa and Mrs. Claus will be there. So, too, will the Grinch — although he'll be unusually festive. There will be dancers and live music, lots of food and drink, ample opportunities to shop, a chance to view the night sky and win local shopping bucks, a scavenger hunt, a parade and a Christmas tree lighting. Someone will even win a new Jeep. And right on schedule, Mother Nature delivered several inches of snow, ensuring a proper wintry setting. Now all that's needed is you. The holiday season unofficially kicks off this weekend, with Ridgway's Noel Night on Friday and Ouray's Yule Celebration on Saturday offering a pair of family-friendly events. Noel Night, sponsored by the Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce and Ridgway FUSE, runs from 4-8 p.m. Friday and features more than 30 businesses, artists and nonprofits in and around the downtown area. There's a holiday art and gift sale from 5 to 8 p.m. Friday at Ridgway Town Hall, with artists selling textiles,

jewelry, paintings, books, pottery, clothing, ornaments and more. The sale continues on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Stores, restaurants and other businesses will offer 10-50% discounts, as well as drawings, giveaways, games and other specials. This year's event has a stargazing theme, an appropriate focus after Ridgway was tapped with an International Dark Sky Community designation in 2020. The Ridgway-Ouray Community Council's Dark Sky Committee will have a table at the Space to Create building and offer passers-by the chance to view the night sky through astronomy binoculars. New this year is an opportunity to win \$150 in Ridgway Local Bucks from Alpine Bank. Visit 10 or more businesses, collect star stickers from them and enter a raffle to win vouchers that can be spent at Ridgway businesses. "We're encouraging the community to not pick one place to hang out," Chamber Executive Director Ashley Perkins said. "It's an opportunity for folks to explore businesses they might not naturally step into." Free child care for children ages 3-11 will be available at

the Voyager Youth Center from 4-7:30 p.m. Santa will be available for photo opportunities there starting at 6 p.m. For more information, visit [ridgwaycolorado.com](http://ridgwaycolorado.com). Double up on the holiday fun by heading to Ouray the next day for the city's Yule Celebration that starts at 10 a.m. and runs into the evening. The festival features an array of events: An "Elf on the

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## UWP

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Ishikawa hopes 2023 will be the year major work on the Governor Basin mine restoration project will be complete. The group has worked for years with the Environmental Protection Agency, Ouray Silver Mines and Trout Unlimited on the effort. The site, located about 10 miles southwest of Ouray, is home to the remnants of two abandoned mines. Piles of waste rock and tailings, material left after ore is extracted, blanket the area and leak waste into the watershed. Work will include diverting water from tailings and capping waste piles with mate-

rials like rock and native plants to prevent erosion. The partnership is also considering a new effort to limit erosion at the Ouray Ice Park, which is partially human-induced. Ishikawa said the project is still in its infancy, and the partnership is starting to work on funding, gauging interest of local governments and talking to partners at the Ice Park. She said steep, man-made roads funnel water into the gorge, bringing sediments into the river and creating ravines that are tripping hazards. Further, climber launch pads deep in the park also cause erosion of the material around them. **Tell us how the community can help you do more good work**

(volunteer opportunities, fundraising goals): The partnership offers volunteer opportunities at RiverFest, and Ishikawa said it's always looking for help at cleanups. She said donations are appreciated as large projects can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and the partnership often has to pitch in financially or match grant funding. Aside from these actions, she said the public can help the effort by becoming informed about the watershed, testing their own wells and learning where their water comes from and how they can conserve it.

## PLANT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

treating water (a.k.a. wholesale water rates) will increase between 12% and 21% for the next few years, followed by annual increases to match inflation," according to the Water Authority's website. Planning for the new facility began in 2019 and, according to a project timeline, construction could begin sometime in 2023. Though the water utilized by the new plant will be from the Ridgway Reservoir, Graham said this will not impact or create new water rights as Project 7's members have rights in the reservoir. It would merely give them direct access to water they already own, as the capacity of the new plant is not larger than that guaranteed by the members' claims. Currently, he said the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association has helped members with rights in Ridgway Reservoir negotiate trades for water elsewhere, such as in Blue Mesa Reservoir. Though complex, this arrangement is not the reason Project 7 is eyeballing a new facility. The plant itself would be located on a 35-acre parcel owned by the Water Authority. Graham said outreach to neighbors has already begun, and the group will work with both Ouray and Montrose county governments as the project is near the county line.

While Project 7 hasn't submitted formal building descriptions yet, County Planning Director Mark Castrodale said he expects the project will require

both a building and special use permit. The River District Grant comes on top of a \$612,059 grant Project 7 received earlier this year for its Desalination and Water Purification Research Program from the Bureau of Reclamation. Graham said this program will be important to the potential new facility, as it allowed the Water Authority to explore different ways of treating the water in Ridgway Reservoir. The water has a high concentration of dissolved minerals that must be treated before it is suitable for drinking. *Kylea Henseler is a journalist with Report for America, a nonprofit national service program which places reporters in underserved areas. To make a tax-deductible contribution to support her work, contact [erin@ouraynews.com](mailto:erin@ouraynews.com).*




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