

Upper Arkansas Thrives

On Dec. 9, 2019, partners selected focus projects for the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative. The group selected Southwest Colorado as its primary focus and to support the Upper South Platte and Upper Arkansas Thrives projects for mutual benefit.

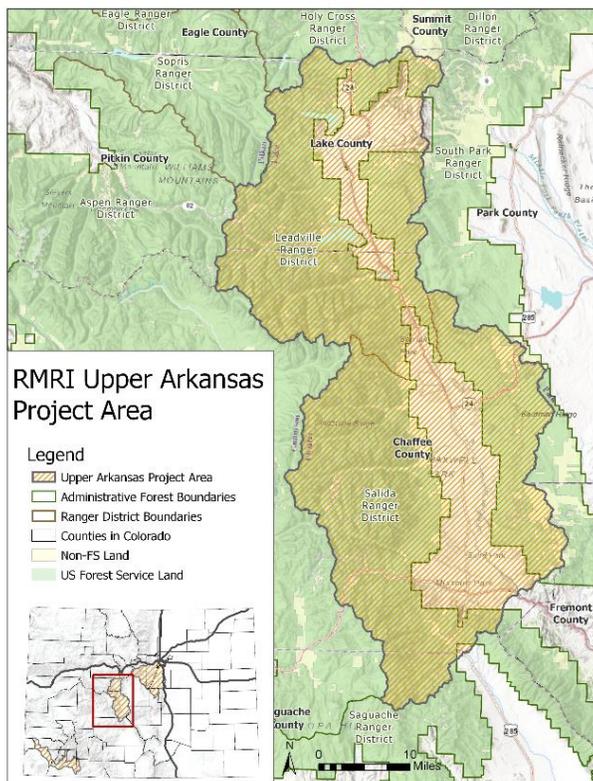
What makes Upper Ark special:

The Ark River Headwaters communities are a model of collaborative impact, working with 80+ partner organizations (county governments, agencies, non-profits and businesses) to restore Arkansas River Headwaters health. The project's top community priority is to accelerate action to address declining forest health related to decades of full fire suppression. Upper Ark Thrives delivers regional and national benefits since these headwaters, in Colorado's largest river basin, provide drinking water for over a million people. The Arkansas River also is the most rafted in the country. The project area hosts over 4 million visitors a year from across the U.S. and around the world.

The project is unique in that it is community-driven, engaging more than 3,500 people. Residents and visitors also provide direct financial support – over \$1 million to date – through the voter-approved Chaffee Common Ground tax measure. RMRI builds on the exceptional community momentum by connecting state and national partners to support project outcomes.

The Upper Ark Thrives project is focused on treating the right acres for the highest community benefit. The 2020 Community Wildfire Protection Plan aims to treat 5-10% of the landscape where mitigation will halve the risk severe wildfire poses to community-prioritized assets. The assets are firefighter lives, water supply, including 3 trans-mountain diversions and 61% of Colorado's Gold Medal trout waters, critical infrastructure such as regional power lines, homes, wildlife habitat and recreation assets.

Colorado's first [Community Recreation and Resource Protection Plan](#) also is being developed. The plan will provide community-supported solutions to manage rapid recreation growth to deliver three community goals: 1) Maintain healthy forests, waters, wildlife and working lands, 2) Retain exceptional outdoor experiences, and 3) Sustain a thriving recreation-based economy.



Our Vision:
The communities of the Arkansas River headwaters working together to enhance the forests, waters, wildlife and working lands that sustain us.

About the Project:

The Arkansas River Headwaters in Lake and Chaffee County provides source waters that support people, agriculture and wildlife from Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico, offering world class recreation and featuring connected communities that deliver innovative solutions to natural resource challenges. Headwaters communities have momentum to enhance the forests, waters and wildlife that sustain residents, visitors and downstream water users.

Partners, agencies and groups involved with the Upper Ark include: Chaffee County Board of Commissioners; Lake County Board of Commissioners; U.S. Forest Service; Envision Chaffee County; Colorado Springs Utilities; Colorado State Forest Service; Arkansas River Watershed Collaborative; Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area; U.S. Bureau of Land Management; Colorado Forest Restoration Institute; Colorado Parks and Wildlife; Chaffee County Fire Protection District; Colorado Fire Camp; Salida Fire Department; South Ark Fire Protection District; Buena Vista Fire Department; Lake County Fire Rescue, Rocky Mountain Research Station; National Forest Foundation; Chaffee County Office of Emergency Management; Chaffee County Under Sheriff; and more than 59 other local partners.