

## NEWS



**HEAVY EQUIPMENT** with Ecological Resource Consultants, Inc. of Evergreen Colo., worked to create new channels, pools and eddies for fish habitat along the Uncompahgre River Tuesday afternoon. About 1,500 feet of the river were reconfigured as designed by the City of Montrose's Uncompahgre River Master Plan. (Photo by William Woody)

## A Place for Fish to Thrive

BY WILLIAM WOODY

**MONTROSE** — The bucket of a yellow excavator swallowed large chunks of river bottom Tuesday, reshaping the flow of the Uncompahgre River with each pass. And that is the goal. Anglers who hunt trout along the river will notice a significant difference in the appearance of the river as improvements to fishing habitat are completed.

Heavy equipment and surveyors with Ecological Resources Consultants Inc., based in Evergreen, have spent the last two weeks digging and carefully creating new aquatic habitat along a 1,500-foot stretch of the river. The project begins at Montrose Recreation District's property behind the softball fields in Baldrige Park and extends north past the handicapped fishing bridge.

David Blauch, Vice President and Senior Ecologist with Ecological Resources Consultants, said the work will improve the aquatic habitat for all native fish species and create a better low-flow channel in the river.

Blauch explained that the

river at 60-feet wide, was "one continuous riffle" and during low flow periods like winter, was too shallow for fish to thrive in.

Using designs from the Uncompahgre River Master Plan, the company placed a series of "four riffle pool sequences" where fast moving water drops into deep pools where fish can come and live. Large boulders were also placed in the channel to create slow moving pockets and eddies where fish can gather.

"Fish like variety, they like resting areas, they like feeding areas, so what we're doing is creating a variety of habitat," Blauch said. "It's ready to go, the fish are moving in already."

Blauch explained that by moving existing stones in the river, a better channel can be created which will improve the river's natural cycle.

The river is "heavily influenced" by flow releases from irrigation and reservoirs, Blauch said, and "historically the river has been pushed all over the place."

"So its natural cycle is out-of-balance," Blauch said. "And that's

what we're trying to do is recreate what nature would have created with the resources that we have."

Blauch said he expects the work to be completed by Friday.

The improvements are part of the city's Uncompahgre River Master Plan. City Engineer Scott Murphy said the project's cost was around \$150,000, with \$90,000 of that amount slated for construction.

As required by the Army Corps. of Engineers, Ecological Resources Consultants is charged with monitoring the 1,500-foot of new river for the next three years.

Part of the master plan's design was a study of the river's flood plain through the area. Flood monitoring will also be conducted.

Murphy said the project is part of major renovations to the river slated for 2014. He said heavy equipment will break ground on the city's new whitewater park this coming November.

"It's better to work in low-flow periods," Murphy said.

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