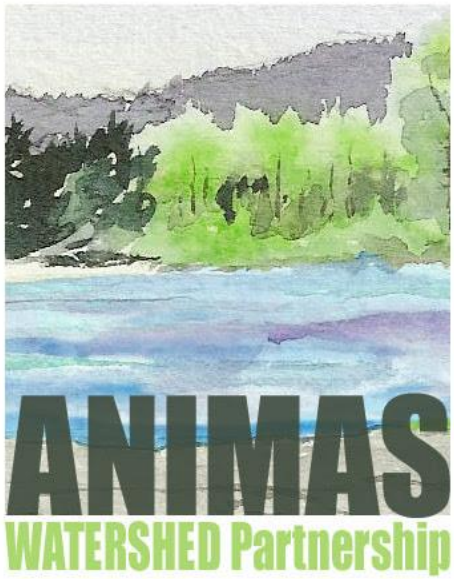

Animas Watershed Partnership Request for Proposals: River Health Assessment

The Animas Watershed Partnership is soliciting proposals from qualified consultants to provide services related to river health assessment and evaluation on a 25-mile stretch of the Animas River through Durango, Colorado. The stretch of river to be assessed is from Bakers Bridge (County Road 250 at the north end of the Animas Valley) to the Southern Ute Indian Tribe Reservation boundary.

RFP and Project Schedule

RFP issued – Monday, January 12, 2026
Proposal submission deadline – Wednesday, February 11, 2026 (5pm MST)
Interviews (if needed) – Between February 23 and March 6, 2026
Consultant selection – Friday, March 13, 2026
Contracting – March
Work to commence – April 1, 2026
Timeline of the work – April 2026 - April 2027, with consultation on draft Animas River Plan (Task 8) through 2027.

Project Description

The Animas Watershed Partnership (AWP) is beginning Phase 2 of the Animas River Plan (ARP), a community-driven plan to protect water resources in the Animas River Watershed. The ARP will be drafted through a comprehensive analysis of both existing and newly collected data, as well as stakeholder input. The ARP will identify and prioritize projects to be implemented to support watershed health.

The Animas River watershed spans portions of San Juan and La Plata County, Colorado, and San Juan County, New Mexico. The Animas River Plan will primarily focus on an approximately 25-mile segment of the Animas River from Bakers Bridge to the border of the Southern Ute Reservation boundary (Figure 1).

The planning process will incorporate a comprehensive river health assessment (RHA) to establish current conditions and address data gaps identified through previous planning efforts.

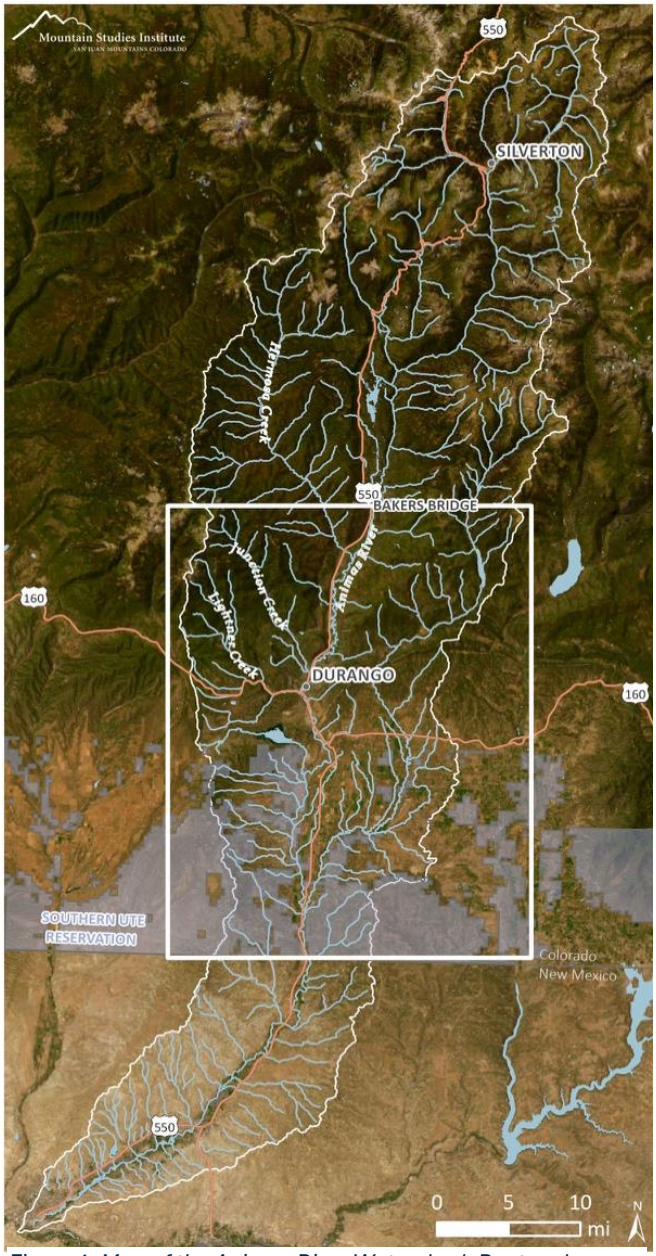

Figure 1. Map of the Animas River Watershed. Rectangle denotes the approximate focus area of the ARP.

Background

In 2022, the AWP, with participation from community partners and stakeholders, evaluated the potential for a watershed plan within the Animas River Watershed. This evaluation, Phase I, determined that the community and stakeholders supported the development of a watershed plan, known as the Animas River Plan.

In 2022 and 2023, stakeholders began scoping the ARP by conducting a data gaps analysis, stakeholder assessment, and identification of priority attributes/areas for a river health assessment. The data gaps analysis reviewed existing data and resources across a diverse set of metrics such as beavers, water quality, and riparian vegetation conditions.

In 2024, partners within the AWP began the process of updating the 2011 Animas River Watershed-Based Plan (WBP) through a CDPHE 319 Nonpoint Source grant. This project focuses on addressing data gaps identified in the gap analysis and synthesizing new information and data collected since the previous WBP. This updated plan will maintain partnerships in the watershed and address known data gaps by conducting riparian condition surveys, gaining a better understanding of the risk to aquatic life from aluminum exceedances, and using spatial analysis to assess potential NPS pollution sources.

The RHA will successfully work with partners to incorporate new WBP data to create a comprehensive RHA. The ARP as a whole will combine stakeholder input, the RHA, the WBP, and other studies (e.g., recreation use, cultural resources) to identify and prioritize projects that can be implemented to work towards stakeholder and community goals for improving watershed health in the Animas River Watershed. Both stakeholder engagement and scientific analysis to evaluate water needs and prioritize actions are imperative to the success of the ARP.

River Health Assessment (RHA) Goals and Objectives

The goals of the river health assessment (RHA) are:

- To create an assessment of river health in tandem with the WBP;
- To gain an understanding of existing river health and water resource conditions using field-based and remotely sensed data; and
- To develop communication tools via the RHA that relay the areas of concern within the planning boundaries in the context of community values.

The RHA will support the following goals and objectives identified by stakeholders for Phase 2 of the ARP:

- Completion of a well-coordinated planning process that informs and incorporates input from stakeholders and the community.
- Identification of existing cooperative, voluntary projects, which have been identified in planning documents and reports or developed through this planning effort, to address multiple water needs, including environmental, recreational, agricultural, and municipal.
- Identification of new cooperative, voluntary projects based on results of assessments conducted during this phase. These projects may require additional technical analysis to help stakeholders evaluate potential project benefits and outcomes.
- Prioritized actions or projects based on stakeholder values and evaluation of benefits (e.g. ecological, economic, recreational, agricultural efficiency), direct or indirect consequences, and feasibility.
- A comprehensive plan that describes the goals, objectives, and results from this process for other organizations or agencies to utilize, reference, and leverage for project implementation.

- Development of educational resources to build community awareness of both the Plan process and outcomes as well as current and future conditions of the Animas River watershed.

Scope of Work and Deliverables

Task 1: Planning Reach Delineation – The technical consultant will delineate reaches on the Animas River within the geographic scope of the RHA based on geologic controls, variations in ecoregion and/or vegetation, valley confinement, geomorphic characteristics, and drainage networks (i.e., tributaries). Reaches will be defined both longitudinally (i.e., upstream to downstream) and laterally (i.e., across the valley bottom to include both channel and floodplain). The technical consultant will develop a naming convention for the delineated reaches. The consultant will also work with authors of the watershed-based plan (WBP) to make sure that the reaches are appropriate for both the WPB and the RHA.

Deliverables:

1. Shapefile delineating project reaches (including valley bottom extent and longitudinal reach breaks).

Task 2: Existing Data Review – The technical consultant will review existing datasets and determine relevance of those documents and databases to the river health assessment effort. Existing datasets are provided in an annotated bibliography in the Animas River Watershed Data Gap Analysis Report (10/9/2023). The consultant will receive guidance from the Steering Committee/core team as to which documents and datasets should be prioritized.

Deliverables:

1. Incorporation of pertinent existing data into river health assessment.

Task 3: Assessment Framework Design – The technical consultant will develop a draft river health assessment framework based on river health drivers outlined in the Colorado River Health Assessment Framework (CoRHAF). At the discretion of the Steering Committee, the consultant will participate in up to 5 meetings with the Steering Committee, Stakeholder Committee, Technical Committee, or Project Team, including tribal partners, to draft and finalize the river health drivers, components, metrics, and data sources that will be included in the assessment, as well as the level of detail that will be involved in the assessment of each driver, component, and/or metric. The consultant will also work with the authors of the WBP to ensure that the river health indicators covered in the WBP are reflected in the RHA.

At a minimum, drivers should include flow regime (including baseflow component), sediment regime, wood regime, water quality (including temperature, nutrients, and metals components), channel dynamics, riparian habitat (including riparian vegetation condition and floodplain connectivity components), aquatic habitat (including physical complexity and streambed composition components), and aquatic food webs (including benthic macroinvertebrates and

fishery components). The technical consultant will also draft scoring criteria for each driver, component, and/or metric, as applicable.

Deliverables:

1. Participation at up to five 90-minute project meetings.
2. Complete set of draft and final drivers, components, and metrics to be used in the river health assessment.
3. Draft scoring criteria/guidelines for each driver, component, and metric, as applicable.

Task 4: Existing and Future Streamflow Evaluation – The technical consultant will characterize flow regime characteristics and spatial and temporal trends based on observed streamflow records. The consultant will also generate spatially distributed simulated streamflow datasets to describe natural flows, existing conditions, and alternative future scenarios, and analyze simulated stream flows to identify departures in existing conditions from natural conditions and changes from existing conditions under alternative futures. Analyses should consider baseflows, peak flows, hydrograph shape, and total annual volume of water, as well as take into account the current water rights portfolio in the region. We encourage use of existing modeling frameworks and datasets such as the State of Colorado's StateMod data and scenarios developed for the Colorado Water Plan, though applicants are welcome to propose alternative approaches that meet project objectives.

Deliverables:

1. Dataset consisting of natural (modeled) flows, existing flows, and simulated future flows using alternative scenarios.
2. Technical memorandum including maps and/or other figures that explain analysis methods and results.

Task 5: River Health Assessment Desktop Evaluation and Fieldwork – Using the framework developed in Task 3 as a guide, the technical consultant will conduct relevant desktop/remote sensing and field-based assessments to score river health drivers, components, and metrics based on available and collected data. Results and data interpretations from the WBP will be incorporated into the RHA.

The desktop/GIS/remote sensing data assessment will include review of aerial imagery and LiDAR data, valley bottom delineations, relative elevation modeling, land ownership mapping, analysis of flow data compiled in Task 4, assessment of water quality and macroinvertebrate data and interpretations included in the WBP, and a US Army Corps of Engineers dataset describing the geometry of the Animas River channel that could be used to evaluate degree of incision. The RHA will build on and expand upon efforts to evaluate floodplain connectivity and riparian condition established in the WBP, as needed. An update on WBP accomplishments to date and anticipated outcomes is provided as Attachment 1.

The field-based assessments will include observational data collection and rapid assessments to characterize hydro-geomorphic condition of the channel, bank, and floodplain; sediment transport and continuity; observations of complexity features (side channels, split flows, backwater areas, wood, point bars, etc); identification of bank armoring and in-channel structures; and channel substrate measurements, embeddedness, and algae presence/cover measurements or observations, as relevant to the agreed-upon framework identified in Task 3. Field data collection will likely be conducted during two visits: one moderate flow visit by boat (~20 miles) and on foot from the public bike path (~5 miles), where observations can be made in all delineated reaches, and one lower-flow visit where channel measurements and field verification of remotely-sensed data, where needed, can be conducted at point locations with permission from appropriate landowners. The Steering Committee will work with the consultant to determine locations where landowner permissions are possible, and the Steering Committee will be responsible for coordinating permissions and engaging with landowners during fieldwork as needed.

The technical consultant will work with the Steering Committee to engage Fort Lewis College (FLC) faculty, staff, and students with the goal of establishing a river health data collection and analysis partnership between AWP and FLC (including the Four Corners Water Center (4CWC) at FLC). Opportunities for engaging FLC faculty and students will be identified collaboratively between the consultant and FLC partners over the course of the RHA. This work may take place in the context of FLC student internships, data collection efforts within FLC courses (e.g., Environmental Research Methods or Collaborative Research), and other projects as determined by AWP, FLC, and the 4CWC.

Deliverables:

1. Incorporation of remote sensing and field-based data into river health assessment.
2. Collaboration with Fort Lewis College and the Four Corners Water Center on data collection, analysis, and interpretation efforts in the context of the RHA, providing opportunities for student training and contributions to this work.

Task 6: Water Infrastructure Assessment – The technical consultant will review existing reports, State CDSS data related to in-channel water infrastructure, and information from discussions between the Steering Committee and local Water Commissioner. Where landowner permissions allow and/or where prioritized by the Steering Committee, the consultant will conduct targeted field-based assessments to fill knowledge gaps regarding structure conditions and infrastructure impacts on aquatic ecosystems (e.g., sediment transport, fish passage, riverscape dynamics).

Deliverables:

1. Technical memorandum reporting results of infrastructure assessment.

Task 7: River Health Assessment Scoring Report – The technical consultant will integrate findings from Task 5 with results from the other tasks to score reaches designated in Task 1 per the framework outlined in Task 3. The consultant will develop a report that provides methods and data used to score each driver, component, and metric, along with scoring results and rationale for the generated scores. Authors of the WBP will contribute to the scoring of relevant drivers, components, and metrics as appropriate. The final report will use weights to "roll up" the scores for each metric, component, and driver, arriving at a final river health score for each reach. The final report will also include an evaluation of potential stressors in the watershed and in the individual reaches that may be influencing the scores, as well as a short description of potential future risks. Some examples include stakeholder-identified priorities such as sediment contributions from Lightner Creek, impacts of historical gravel mining throughout the Animas Valley, and bacteria/water quality concerns related to mobile home park permit compliance. The final technical report will be accompanied by a more visually-pleasing and approachable public-facing summary document and/or integration into the AWP website.

Deliverables:

1. Draft technical river health assessment methods and scoring report.
2. Final technical river health assessment methods and scoring report.
3. Public-facing river health assessment summary document or web page.

Task 8: Consultation on Animas River Plan (ARP) and Projects List – The technical consultant will review a draft of the ARP (completed by the AWP) that will incorporate RHA existing conditions with other relevant studies related to river uses, river management, and community benefits (e.g., recreation, cultural resources, infrastructure) and provide feedback on the document. The technical consultant will also contribute to the development of a list of projects that satisfy the objectives of the ARP and address some of the major stressors revealed in the RHA. These activities will likely occur after the RHA is completed, and will be done at the request of the project team as needed.

Deliverables:

1. ARP review and comments.
2. Meeting with the Steering Committee to discuss project identification and prioritization.

Task 9: Project Management – The technical consultant will meet regularly with the Steering Committee to discuss project progress and next steps. This task also allows some time for internal meetings among ARP contractors.

Deliverables:

1. Monthly meetings with Steering Committee and/or Project Team.

Proposal Submittal Requirements and Evaluation Criteria

Please submit a single pdf document limited to 8 pages (excluding resumes). Proposals should be on 8½x11" paper, single spaced, size 12 font (Times New Roman or Arial), have no less than ½" margins, and must contain the following:

- Team Experience and Demonstrated Results:
  - Qualifications and short bios of professional personnel proposed for the project and firm location(s)
  - Resumes for key project team members (included in an appendix)
  - Description and examples of past experience, representative projects, and background in river and riparian science, including experience in river health assessment, geospatial analysis, watershed planning, and Colorado/Western US river system processes and stressors
  - Three client references
- Strategic Thinking and Planning Approach:
  - The team's approach and strategy for providing the requested services outlined in the scope of work
  - Project schedule identifying milestones and completion dates
- Budget Approach/Cost-Effectiveness:
  - Cost estimate including a detailed budget outlining associated costs for meeting project deliverables as outlined in scope of work
  - Hourly rates of pertinent personnel

Proposals should not exceed the grant-funded amount of $134,970. Please submit proposals on or before 5pm MST on Wednesday, February 11, 2026 to Sensa Wolcott via email (healthyanimas.awp@gmail.com) with "Animas River Health Assessment RFP" in the subject line.

Proposals will be evaluated using the criteria described in the table below.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria		
Proposal meets requirements of the RFP Does the proposal as submitted meet the requirements outlined in the RFP?	Yes/No	Pass/Fail
Team Experience and Demonstrated Results Our evaluation will include an assessment of the team's qualifications, background, experience, and project examples to ensure work and technical skills align with the needs of the AWP and the ARP.	Ranking 1-5 (low-high)	45%
Strategic Thinking/Planning Approach Our evaluation will assess the overall approach and strategy outlined in the proposal as well as the team's capacity to perform the assessment in the specified timeframe, while working with specified partners.	Ranking 1-5 (low-high)	45%
Budget Approach/Cost-Effectiveness Our evaluation will assess the proposal's effective and efficient delivery of quality services in relation to proposed budget allocation and whether the allocation of funds is reasonable and appropriate.	Ranking 1-5 (low-high)	10%