

What do Colorado Agricultural Producers think of Watershed Management Plans? Results of the Ag Water NetWORK's 2019 survey

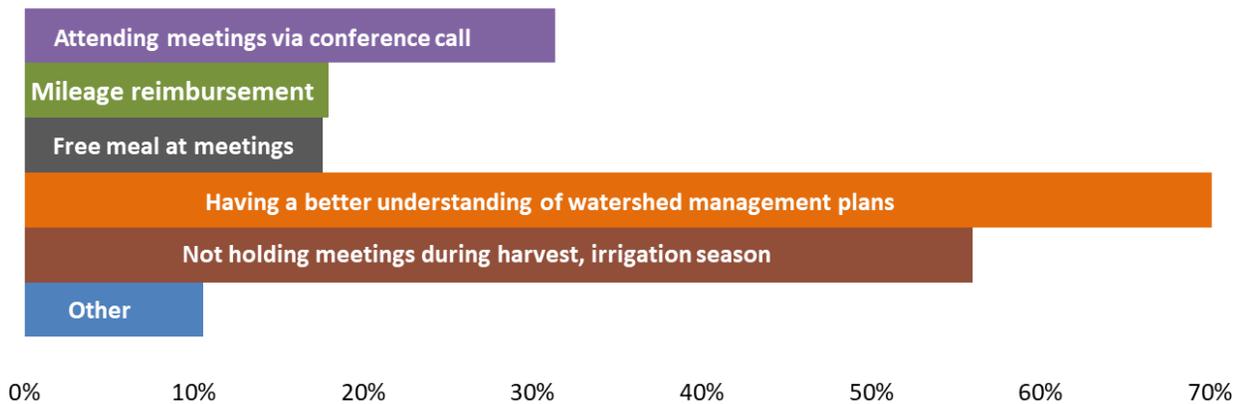
Part 2 in a 2-Part Series

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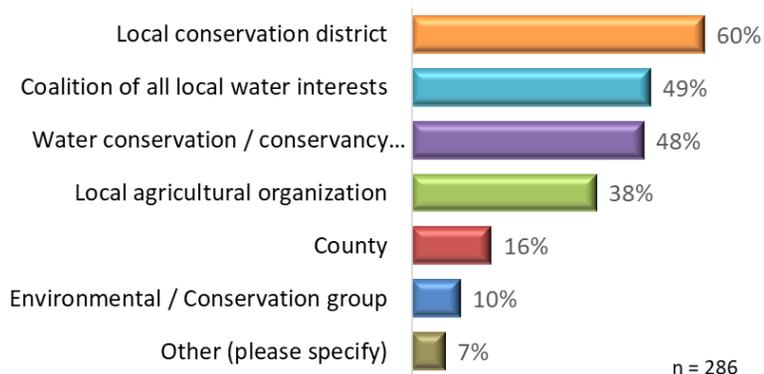
From January through April 2019, the Colorado Cattlemen's [Ag Water NetWORK](#) surveyed Colorado agricultural producers to assess their priorities and perspectives related to watershed and stream management planning.

If you were to participate in a watershed planning meeting, which of the following would be helpful?



Seventy (70) percent of producers indicated it would be helpful to have a better understanding of watershed management plans if they were to participate in the planning process. Fifty-six (56) percent said not holding meetings during harvest or irrigation season would also be helpful. About one-third indicated that attending meetings via conference call would better enable them to participate. Producers also indicated that evening meetings work best (46 percent) followed by mid- to late afternoon time-frames. The Ag Water NetWORK is focusing on outreach and training in 2019 and 2020 to help producers better understand the various aspects of watershed and stream management plans and how agriculture can benefit by being involved in local watershed planning efforts.

Which entities are well-suited to lead or co-lead watershed planning efforts in your area?



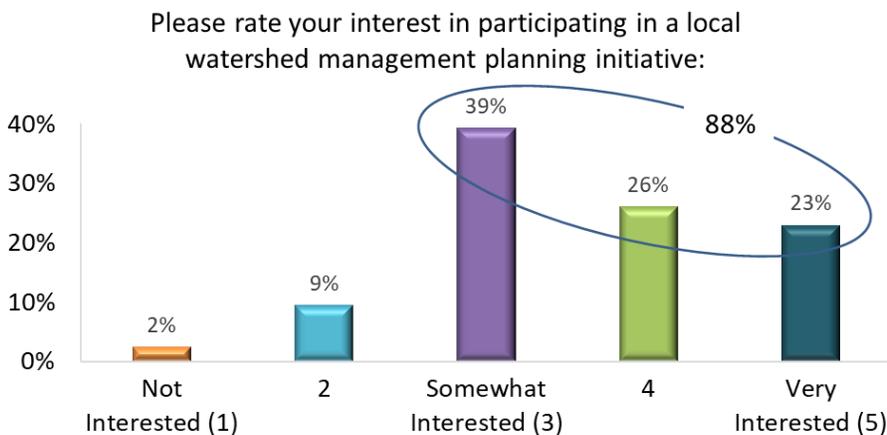
Who should lead or co-lead local watershed or stream management planning efforts? A majority of producers (60 percent) thought their local conservation district was the most suitable entity. A 'coalition of local water interests' and the 'local water conservation / conservancy district' were choices selected by almost half of producers. And 38 percent said a local agricultural organization.

More than half – 54 percent - of the producers that took the survey indicated they had been or were currently involved in a watershed management planning effort. When asked what specific role they would prefer, 42 percent indicated they would be occasional attendees with no formal role. Forty (40) percent preferred a subcommittee member position and 13 percent were willing to lead or co-lead a local planning effort. More than one in ten were willing to host other water stakeholders at their farm or ranch to showcase water-related improvements.

On average, producers that indicated a willingness to serve as a leader or co-leader rated their familiarity with watershed planning a 3.9 out of 5. Conversely, producers that were unsure how they would engage on watershed planning rated their own familiarity with the watershed planning process a 1.2 out of 5. This dichotomy suggests greater producer familiarity with watershed management planning leads to greater involvement in the planning process.



Producers strongly supported the idea of having a local ag-oriented person serve as a "liaison" to help represent agriculture's interests at local watershed management planning and implementation meetings. On a scale of 1 to 5, the average score was a 4.5 in support. The Ag Water NetWORK has created a training program to help prepare interested producers and other ag-familiar individuals who want to represent agricultural interests on local watershed and stream management planning efforts. Training is being conducted in cooperation with local ag-connected organizations and the Colorado Ag Water Alliance (CAWA).



Agricultural producers are interested in being involved in watershed management planning. Eighty-eight (88) percent of producers indicated they were at least “somewhat interested” in participating in a local watershed management planning initiative. Almost 1 in 4 indicated that they were “very interested” in participating.

The collaboration that goes into developing a watershed plan better positions local water users to effectively deal with increased demand in the face of diminished water availability. Watershed planning and implementation can bring many benefits to agriculture. Previously funded practices benefiting agriculture have included new or upgraded river diversion structures with fish access, ditch lining or piping, stream channel, embankment and riparian area restoration, wildfire mitigation and restoration, watershed and recharge area assessment, and phreatophyte removal.

CCA's Ag Water NetWORK is a grant-funded initiative with a mission to help 'keep ag water connected with ag land.'