



*In this picture before construction, the gravel push-up that restricted flow and trapped fish is seen in the center section of the Gunnison River.*

## ***2021 Upper Gunnison River Restoration & Irrigation Infrastructure Improvement Project***

### **A MULTI-BENEFICIAL WATER RESOURCE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

It started as a grant application to the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District (UGRWCD) from an area agricultural producer who wanted to improve his irrigation headgate. He came to UGRWCD seeking funding assistance to help him offset the costs of his proposed project. Through communication with the downstream irrigation divertor about irrigation water management challenges and interest in shared infrastructure and a chance meeting with the Watershed Management Planning Agricultural Coordinator, thus began the groundwork of the *2021 Upper Gunnison River Restoration & Irrigation Infrastructure Improvement Project*.

By taking the approach of combining two parallel and redundant irrigation diversion structures 25 feet apart from each other on the Gunnison River into a single shared point of diversion with modernized irrigation infrastructure, this

project resulted in the restoration of a severely impacted segment of the river. For agricultural producers, the project helped protect their water rights and improve irrigation water management, efficiency, and productivity for over 1900 acres of irrigated land in the Gunnison Mainstem and Tomichi Creek sub-basins. For recreational users, the project opened-up the narrowed river channel which was causing erosion and negatively impacted rafting and fishing. Finally, the river improvements benefit the environment by supporting the aquatic community and fishery and bolstering critical wet meadow habitat for the threatened Gunnison Basin Sage Grouse. The project is expected to be completed by November 2021.

In addition to grant funding and in-kind services contributed by the Upper Gunnison District, the project received financial and in-kind support from the John B. Outcalt No. 2 and Gunnison Tomichi Valley Ditch water right holders, Trout Unlimited, Colorado River Water Conservation District Community Funding Program, State of Colorado Stream Management Planning Program, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

*(Photos courtesy of Jesse Kruthaupt, Trout Unlimited and Sonja Chavez, UGRWCD.)*



*Using heavy machinery, trenches are dug in preparation for pouring footers.*



*It is almost complete! Some minor channel work will wrap up the project soon.*



*The new diversion structure was engineered specifically for the project.*