

### 9.0 Chico Creek Watershed

#### 9.1 Introduction and Overview

Chico Creek Watershed (Figure 9-1) is about 736 mi<sup>2</sup> and is located in the southeastern portion of El Paso County and the northeastern portion of Pueblo County, immediately east of the Fountain Creek Watershed. The two main subwatersheds within the Chico Creek Watershed are, Upper Black Squirrel and Chico Creek. Although there is not much existing urban density development, a number of major urban developments have been approved at the conceptual stage in the Upper Black Squirrel subwatershed. Currently, the Upper Black Squirrel subwatershed is primarily a rural area and consists of small clusters of single-family homes and Chico Creek consists of large farms and has several unique ecosystems. Both of these areas are included in the South Central Comprehensive Plan which is a small area element of the El Paso County Master Plan.

##### 9.1.1 Land Use

As mentioned before, the Upper Black Squirrel subwatershed is primarily a rural area that consists of existing and proposed small clusters of single-family homes (see discussion under Population and Socioeconomic Characteristics). Between these proposed clusters of single-family homes, the area is primarily rural in nature.

In the Chico Creek subwatershed, the Colorado State Land Board is the largest single landowner. The Land Board owns about 215,000 acres of land (about half of the total watershed area) in the Chico Creek and 260,000 acres of mineral rights. Since 1994, (Routten, Colorado State Land Board and the Chico Basin) the Land Board has:

- Acquired 75,000 acres of shortgrass and sand sage prairie;
- Designated 90,000 acres in the Stewardship Trust; and
- Issued two 25 year leases for ranches (Chico Basin, Bohart Ranches and Frost Ranches) encompassing over 20,000 square miles, which encourage educational and conservation efforts.

The major goal of these acquisitions was to assemble large contiguous properties which could be managed more effectively than the 640 acre sections of trust lands that are typically found on the eastern plains. The two largest contiguous parcels which the Land Board owns are the Chico Basin and Bohart Ranches.

##### 9.1.2 Population and Socioeconomic Characteristics

Currently, the Chico Creek Subwatershed has a population of less than about 1,000 people (Schuler, 2002). Growth of the Colorado Springs Metropolitan Area is causing a

trend towards outward rural and rural expansion into both Subwatersheds. Existing and proposed development in the Upper Black Squirrel Subwatershed includes the Ellicott Springs/Sunset Village area, Ellicott School, Woodmen Hills, Santa Fe Springs, Meridian Ranch, Viewpoint Village, Springs East, Falcon Highlands and other subdivisions in the Falcon area. El Paso County Planning is coordinating future planning along the Highway 94 corridor.

Within the watershed, along eastern and southern portions of the County not owned by the State, there has been a trend towards 35-acre developments (Schuler, 2002). This is important since parcels of 35 acres or greater are exempt from local subdivision control and do not have specific regulations, requirements and fees. This allows the possibility for higher density development and can also create water quality problems.

### **9.1.3 Characterization Watershed Issues**

The primary watershed issues have to do with the increased threat of urbanization and related issues, especially in the northern portion of the Upper Black Squirrel Subwatershed. When this is coupled with lack of regulatory control on lots of 35 acres or greater, problems associated with water quality, erosion and sedimentation can be compounded. Groundwater quality could be impacted from an increased reliance on on-site wastewater systems instead of centralized wastewater treatment.

Many of the homes and communities in this area rely on groundwater and depletion of the groundwater resources could threaten the biodiversity and availability of water in the area. An adequate supply of groundwater is critical to a healthy and sustainable system.

Over grazing and grazing along streams/creeks is also an issue, although several of the ranches in this area are taking proactive steps to minimize possible impacts. Results of a survey conducted in 2000, ([www.chicobasinranch.com](http://www.chicobasinranch.com)) indicate that there is an interest to develop a community-based conservation and direct marketing network that supports a diverse enterprise mix of traditional and non-traditional ranch products.

# Chico Creek Watershed Reference Map

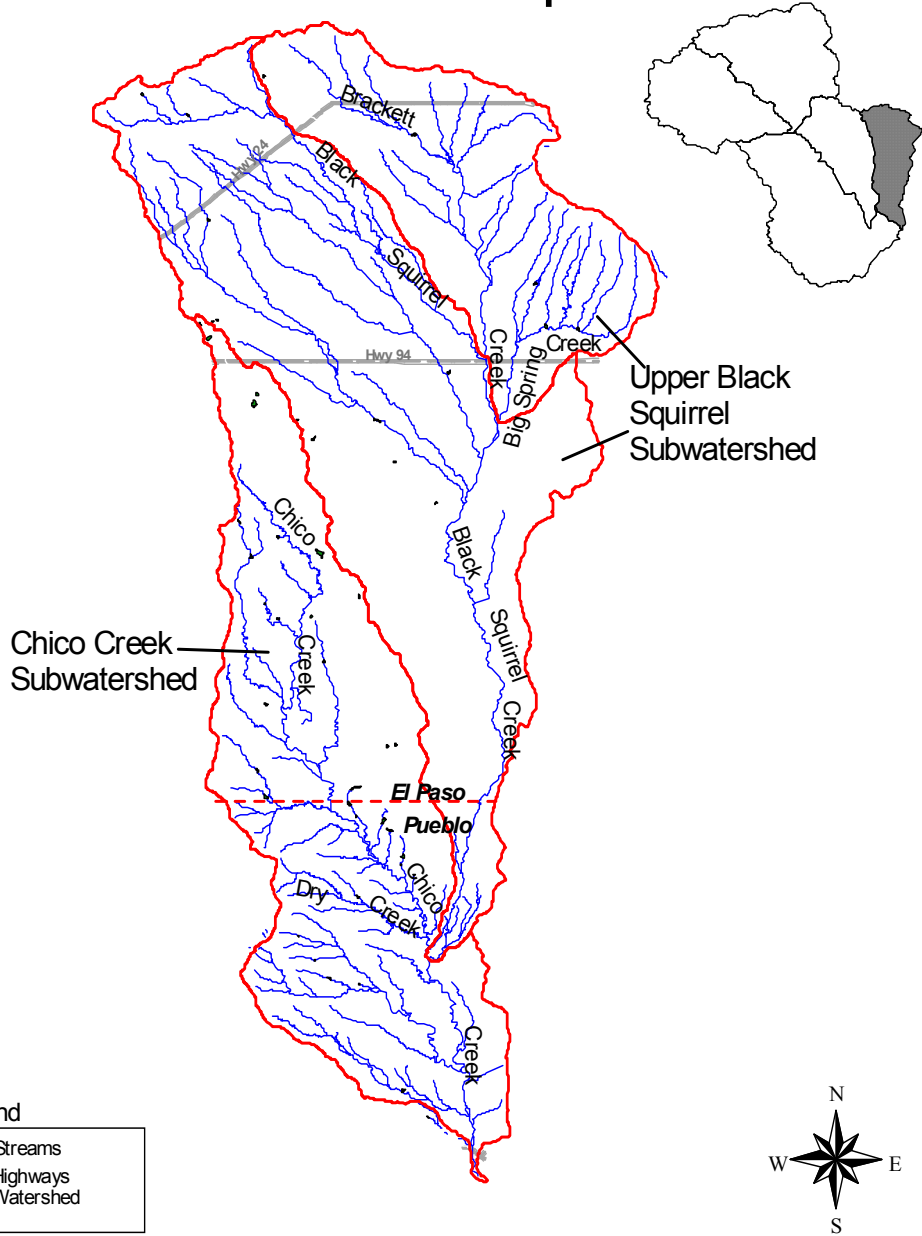


Figure 9-1

### 9.1.4 Overview of Watershed Activities

Activities that have been completed in the watershed are listed below:

- Chico Basin Conservation Leadership Initiative has been meeting under the organization of the Nature Conservancy. This leadership initiative was a follow up from the Chico Basin Symposium that was held in February, 2002, to discuss issues ranging from “The Ecological Importance of the Chico Basin” to “Economics of Ranching in the Chico Basin.” Among the goals of this group were to identify and engage local leadership in conservation issues.
- Highway 94 Master Plan – This Plan (El Paso County, 2003) was developed in 2003 and will be used as a guide for future County Commissioners’ actions concerning land development requests along Highway 94.
- Black Squirrel Basin Project Floodplain Group. The goals of this group are to:
  - Site and install Flood Warning Sensors. The sensors would probably be installed above the upper reaches of Black Squirrel Creek, above Ellicott.
  - Look at floodplain maps for the area and determine their accuracy and possible need to revise floodplain delineation maps. Two foot contour mapping has been flown in this area.