

11. Upper Arkansas Watershed

11.1. Introduction and Overview

The Upper Arkansas Watershed is the single largest watershed in the Arkansas River Basin and only a fraction, about 15%, is within the Pikes Peak region, mostly in Teller County. Section 7.0 will focus on the Teller County portion of the Upper Arkansas Watershed.

The Upper Arkansas Watershed encompasses a total of six counties: Teller, Park, El Paso, Custer, Fremont, and Pueblo, with most of the watershed located within Fremont and Pueblo counties. The Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments (UACOG) is a voluntary coalition collaborating across its region for years to conduct regional water quality management planning. UACOG covers the four counties of Lake, Chaffee, Fremont, and Custer, located in portions of the Upper Arkansas Headwaters and Upper Arkansas Watersheds; and the Pueblo Area Council of Governments (PACOG) covers Pueblo County, located in the Upper and Middle Arkansas Watersheds.

UACOG: <http://www.uaacog.com/home.html>

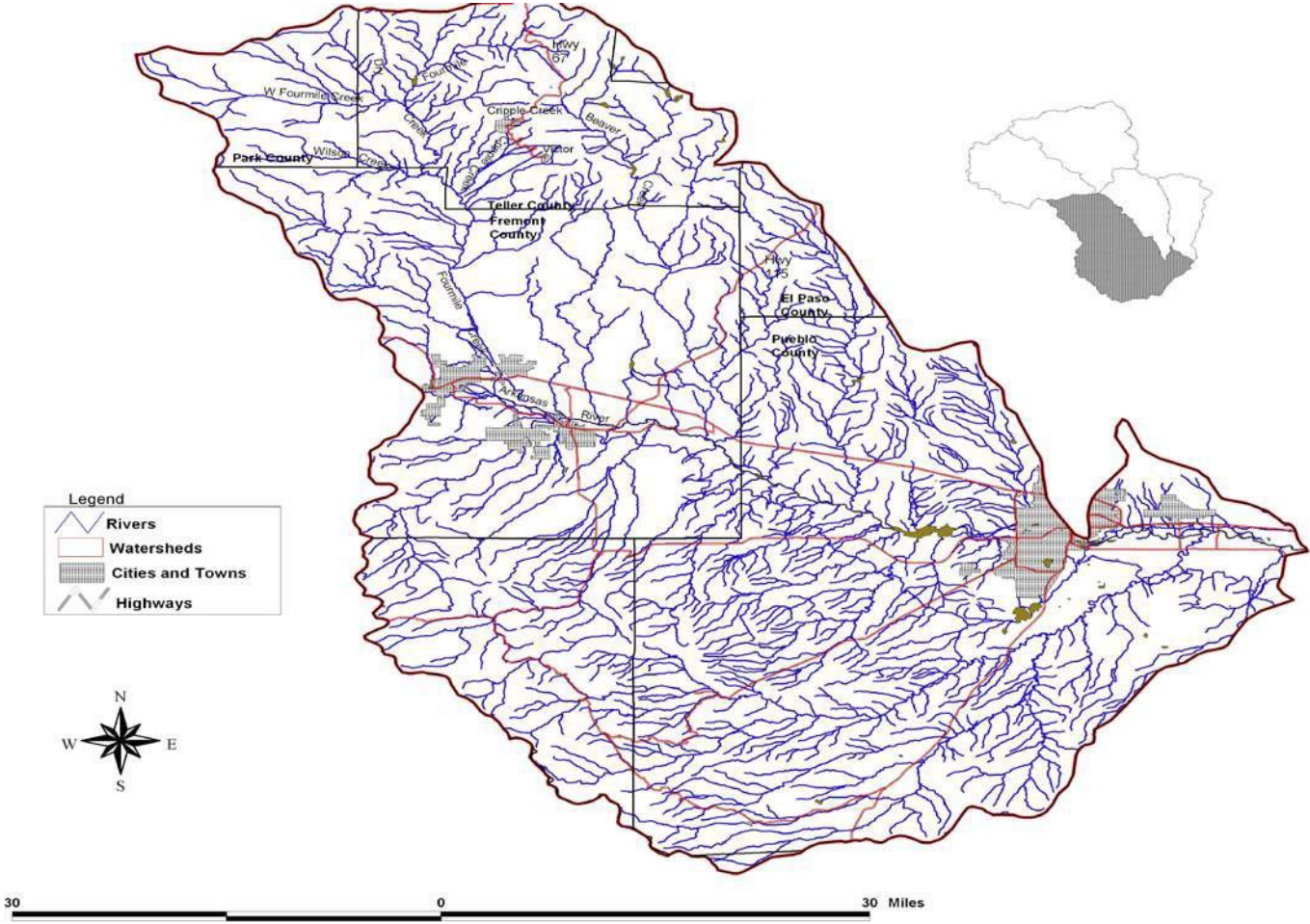
PACOG: <https://county.pueblo.org/pacog/pueblo-area-council-governments-home>

The watershed consists of high narrow valleys that contain mountainous topography characterized by many steep slopes and canyons. There is a natural divide from east to west that runs through Teller County; the east side flows to the South Platte River and the west side flows to the Arkansas River. Highway 67 is the main highway connecting Woodland Park to Cripple Creek. Within Teller County, most of the land in the southeastern to middle portions is privately owned; land along the southwestern portion is owned by the U.S. Forest Service. Historic mining operations conducted in this region were on the privately-owned land.

11.2. Land Use

Land use primarily consists of urban and suburban development, grazing, recreation, and mining. Historically, gold mining had a major impact on characterizing this region. Most of the mining took place in the mid to late 1800s, although Cripple Creek and Victor still have an active gold mining operation. Most of the historic mines are located in what is now Cripple Creek and Victor's current permitted boundary area. Gold mining is expected to continue to economically drive the county and the communities of Cripple Creek and Victor. Near Cripple Creek and Victor, there are interpretive sites and trails that show and explain the 1890s gold mines. Recreational uses of the land include motorized and nonmotorized vehicles.

11.3. Figure: Upper Arkansas Watershed Reference Map



11.4. Population and Socioeconomic Characteristics

DOLA projects 25,630 people living in Teller County by 2020. About 8,700 people live in the Upper Arkansas Watershed. Of the 8,700 residents, Cripple Creek and Victor are the two largest municipalities within the Upper Arkansas Watershed and have a combined population of about 1,600 people (DOLA, 2010).

Teller County faces the challenges brought about by rapid growth and the demand to preserve the natural habitat that continues to draw residents and tourism to the area as it has for over 100 years. It is expected that tourism, retirees, and more basic industries will continue to increase the population of Teller County. However, limitations such as adequate water supplies remain. High demands and build-out of small lots are apparent in Cripple Creek Estates, Colorado Mountain Estates, and Rainbow Valley.

11.5. Characterization of Watershed Issues Water quality issues primarily revolve around:

- Expansion of Newmont Mining Corporation, Cripple Creek & Victor Gold Mining Company (CC&V).
- Groundwater supply and water quality issues are a problem as identified by TST (2001) (primary causes are from septic systems).
- Impacts from population growth.
- Stormwater runoff, which has not been a major problem in either Cripple Creek or Victor, but as these cities grow, a stormwater program may need to be developed.