

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR, U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

SOUTH PLATTE RIVER--LIFELINE OF A REGION

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U.S. Geological Survey Open-file Report 99-56

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY VIDEO SCRIPT

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

Final Script

VIDEO

AUDIO

TIGHT SHOT OF RIVER IN MOUNTAINS  
OVERLAY TITLE  
"SOUTH PLATTE RIVER-LIFELINE OF A REGION"

NATURAL SOUND OPEN/WATER FLOWING

PAN OF SOUTH PARK

**NARRATOR (VOICE-OVER, VO):** It's northeastern Colorado's water-supply lifeline. But what do you know about the South Platte River? Where does it start...and where does it end? What happens to the water along its journey? And, why should we care?

AERIAL OF RIVER IN PLAINS LOOKING LIKE END OF BASIN

AERIAL SHOTS OF THE SOUTH PLATTE RIVER IN MOUNTAINS,

In the next few minutes, we'll become familiar with the river, answering these and other questions.

AERIAL SHOTS OF THE SOUTH PLATTE RIVER IN TRANSITION ZONE

MUSIC UP THEN IN FULL, MUSIC DOWN AND UNDER

AERIAL SHOTS OF THE SOUTH PLATTE RIVER IN PLAINS

The South Platte River and its tributaries provide critical water supplies.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

AGRICULTURE SCENE

SOMEONE DRINKING WATER.

RAFTING

POWER PLANT

**NARRATOR (VO):** More than two-thirds of Colorado's population, about two and a half million people, rely on the basin's water for agriculture, public water supplies, recreation, and power generation.

SHOT OF RIVER

SHOT OF WELL

Most of that supply, about 71 percent, is taken from river water, and the rest is pumped from wells that tap underground sources called aquifers.

FADE TO MAP SHOWING 3 STATES AND OUTLINE OF SOUTH PLATTE RIVER BASIN--**GRAPHIC #1**  
file: videograph1.eps

The South Platte River Basin covers 24-thousand square miles and includes much of northeastern Colorado and small portions of Wyoming and Nebraska.

MAP OF BASIN SHOWING SOUTH PLATTE AND MAJOR TRIBUTARIES--**GRAPHIC #2**  
file: videograph2.eps

The river basin or watershed is defined as the region drained by the South Platte River and its tributary streams.

SAME MAP HIGHLIGHTING THE SOUTH PLATTE RIVER--**GRAPHIC #2b**  
file: videograph2b.eps

SAME MAP HIGHLIGHTING TRIBUTARIES--**GRAPHIC #2c**

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

GO BACK TO **GRAPHIC #2b** WITH SOUTH PLATTE RIVER HIGHLIGHTED  
file: videograph2b.eps

OVERLAY THE BELOW SHOTS ON GRAPHIC #2

CUT TO SHOT OF SNOW ON MOUNTAINS

SHOTS OF STREAMS IN MOUNTAINS

TRANSITION ZONE

PLAINS STREAM

DRY LANDSCAPES WITH GREENBELT

CUT TO STRONTIA SPRINGS DAM

AUDIO

**NARRATOR (VO):** The South Platte River is 450 miles long. Most of the flow comes from snowmelt in the mountains.

Along its journey, the South Platte assumes three distinct personalities. First at its origin, it cascades as a picturesque mountain stream. Second it flows through a transition zone from high country to the flatlands. Finally, it spreads out as a braided channel, meandering across the plains into Nebraska. Here it joins the North Platte River to form the Platte River.

The South Platte truly is a water lifeline for this region... but in order to meet all the demands for water, the water system has become highly regulated.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
CHIPS BARRY  
DENVER WATER

**C. BARRY (SOT):** "Water management here means you have to assemble water from a lot of different places in the state, bring it together in a coordinated fashion so you can serve people..."

AERIAL SHOWING LITTLE  
WATER IN PLAINS

**NARRATOR (VO):** Historically, the South Platte River dried up on the plains in the summer.

CUT TO SIMILAR SHOT  
WITH MORE WATER

Now, water management keeps the water flowing all year.

CUT TO MAP OF SOUTH  
PLATTE BASIN---  
**GRAPHIC #2**  
file: videograph2.eps

Here's a look at how the management process works.

HIGHLIGHT TRANS-  
MOUNTAIN DIVERSIONS--  
**GRAPHIC #3a**  
file: videograph3A.eps

Water is imported from west of the Continental Divide through 12 trans-mountain diversions into tributary streams.

OVERLAY SHOTS OF  
ROBERTS TUNNEL

HIGHLIGHT RESERVOIRS  
ON MAP---**GRAPHIC #3b**  
file: videograph3b.eps

...it is stored in dozens of reservoirs...

OVERLAY SHOTS OF  
RESERVOIRS

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

DIVERSIONS HIGH-  
LIGHTED---**GRAPHIC #3c**  
file: videograph3c.eps

**NARRATOR (VO):** ... and is diverted from  
streams for variety of uses.

OVERLAY SHOT OF  
DIVERSIONS

HIGHLIGHT WELLS---  
**GRAPHIC #3d** file:  
videograph3d.eps

In addition, several thousand wells pump water  
from shallow aquifers along the South Platte and  
its tributaries.

OVERLAY SHOT OF  
WELLS OR PIVOT  
IRRIGATION

IRRIGATION SHOT IN  
FIELDS

By the time any of the river's water leaves the  
basin, it's been used and recycled for various  
purposes including irrigation and watering  
livestock; water supplies for domestic, commercial,  
and industrial uses; recreation; and power  
generation. Each of these uses can affect the  
quality of water and its suitability for other uses  
downstream.

SHOT OF LIVESTOCK

ICE IN GLASS

WATERING FLOWERS  
NEAR 19TH ST BRIDGE

SHOT OF COMMERCE  
CITY

PERSON FISHING

POWER PLANT

CLOSEUP SHOT OF  
WATER FLOWING  
DOWNSTREAM

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

USGS SCIENTIST TAKING  
WATER SAMPLE AT LOW  
FLOW

CUT TO USGS SCIENTIST  
TAKING WATER SAMPLES  
FROM CABLE CAR

USGS SCIENTIST  
POURING SAMPLE INTO  
CONE SPLITTER.

USGS SCIENTIST TAKING  
GROUND WATER  
SAMPLES

USGS SCIENTIST (BRET)  
POURING WATER  
SAMPLE INTO  
GRADUATED CYLINDER,  
ADDING REAGENTS  
WHICH CAUSE SAMPLE  
TO TURN BLUE, THEN  
TITRATE TILL BLUE  
WATER DISAPPEARS

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
KEVIN DENNEHY  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

**NARRATOR (VO):** Because of the river's importance to the region, scientists from the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey have been studying the quality of water in the South Platte River, its tributaries, and associated shallow aquifers. The USGS is the nation's earth science information agency.

This study is part of a USGS National Water-Quality Assessment Program known as NAWQA.

Between 1991 and 1996, the USGS set out to learn as much as possible about the surface and ground water resources in the basin.

**K. Dennehy (SOT):** "The goals of NAWQA are three-fold, first to provide a nationally consistent description of current water quality conditions of the Nation's Water Resources, ...

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

CUT TO NATURAL SHOTS  
OF RIVER

**K. Dennehy (VO):** ..second is assess the long-term trends in water quality, and third is to identify, describe and explain to the extent possible the various natural and human factors that affect water quality and trends."

CUT TO CLOSE UP OF  
TRASH IN WATER OR  
OTHER OBVIOUS SHOT  
OF HUMANS AFFECT ON  
WATER

USGS CREW MEASURING  
HABITAT

**NARRATOR (VO):** The South Platte study examined physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of water within the river basin.

SHOTS OF METERS IN  
WATER

ELECTROFISHING/FISH IN  
BUCKETS/ MEASURING  
AND RECORDING LENGTH  
AND WEIGHT IN  
MOUNTAIN SETTINGS

The water analysis...as well as biological studies...provided critical data that enabled scientists to document natural and human affects on water quality in the South Platte River Basin.

FADE TO GRAPHIC OF  
MAP OF THE SOUTH  
PLATTE RIVER BASIN  
WITH THE MOUNTAINS  
HIGHLIGHTED---

MUSIC UP AND OUT

**GRAPHIC #4a** file:  
videograph4a.eps

SCENIC SHOTS OF SNOW  
COVERED MOUNTAINS

NATURAL SOUND/INGERSOLL'S SKIS IN  
SNOW

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

USGS SCIENTIST  
SKIS/SNOW SHOES FROM  
ABOVE MEDIUM SHOT OF  
GEORGE AND JEFF  
PASSING BY  
WIDE VISTA FROM TOP  
OF CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

SHOTS CONTINUED

TILT DOWN TO SHOW  
GEORGE AND JEFF  
DIGGING

TIGHTER SHOT OF  
DIGGING

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
GEORGE INGERSOLL  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

AUDIO

**NARRATOR (VO):** These USGS hydrologists work high in the Rocky Mountains...and today they're on their way up to the Continental Divide, where the South Platte River and its tributaries begin.

This is an annual trip to study snowfall accumulation and its chemical composition.

NATURAL SOUND OF DIGGING

**G. INGERSOLL (SOT):** "Well, we're preparing a snowpit all the way down to ground level to sample the annual snowpack here near Loveland Pass at about 11,900 feet. With the primary objective of looking at water quality."

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

SHOW GEORGE DIGGING  
LAYERS FOR SAMPLE

GEORGE COLLECTING  
SAMPLE

GEORGE AND JEFF  
TAKING SAMPLE DOWN  
HILL

GENERIC SHOTS OF  
CLOSEUP OF VEHICLE  
EMISSIONS

VAPORS OR DUST IN AIR  
FROM FARMING  
ACTIVITIES

CUT TO SHOT OF SNOW  
IN MOUNTAINS NEAR  
CONTINENTAL DIVIDE

**G. INGERSOLL (VO):** "In this basin, in these mountains roughly two-thirds to three-quarters of the annual precipitation falls as snow. And it offers us an excellent opportunity to capture the majority of the annual precip in one sample."

**NARRATOR (VO):** These scientists discovered that chemicals, primarily nitrogen compounds from human sources such as, power plants, motor vehicle emissions, and agricultural practices are being transported through the atmosphere and deposited in the snow in trace amounts; although trace amounts of these chemicals generally have little affect on the quality of water for drinking, they are evidence that humans impact the environment.

This information is important because snow in the mountains provides the major source of water supplies for the South Platte River Basin.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

SHOT OF CLEAR CREEK  
FLOODING

VIEW OF CHEESEMAN

CUT TO AERIAL OF  
STRONTIA SPRINGS

AERIAL OF DIVERSION  
INTO HIGHLINE CANAL  
SHOW CANAL AND RIVER  
RUNNING PARALLEL

CUT TO OUTFLOW FROM  
STRONTIA SPRINGS DAM

SERIES OF SHOTS OF  
MINE TAILINGS ALONG  
CLEAR CREEK

**NARRATOR (VO):** The mountain snowpack begins to thaw in late spring... and results in high streamflows. Reservoirs on the South Platte River like Eleven Mile, Cheeseman, and Strontia Spring, slow the flow of water...and capture snowmelt runoff for public water supplies and agricultural use later in the year.

In addition, numerous canals divert water from the river.

As a result, the South Platte River's natural flow is significantly altered all along its course.

Like flow, water quality has also been affected by humans.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

MINE TAILING SHOTS  
CONTINUED

**NARRATOR (VO):** The biggest effect on water quality in some mountain streams is a remnant of Colorado's mining past and present. Old, abandoned mines along South Platte tributaries, most notably Clear Creek, can degrade water quality locally. Runoff from mine tailings is often acidic and contaminated with metals ...

SHOT OF ARGO TUNNEL  
SHOWING DATE

PAN OF DUCK CREEK  
AND GENEVA CREEK  
GOING FROM CLEAN  
WATER TO WHITE  
STREAMBED TO ORANGE  
STREAMBED

As a result, streambed sediments are locally discolored and large quantities of metals, such as, iron, manganese, zinc, copper, and aluminum are found in both water and sediment.

CLOSEUP OF IRON OXIDE  
IN STREAM CHANNEL

Small quantities of metals are needed by all living things. However, in large amounts these metals become toxic.

CUT TO SHOT OF WHITE  
COATED STREAM WHICH  
GIVE THE APPEARANCE  
OF BEING STERILE

As a result, algae, insect, and fish communities were less diverse or absent in tributaries affected by mining compared to other mountain streams.

FADE TO ESTES PARK  
SHOTS

AUDIO BREAK--RELATED TO POPULATION IN  
MOUNTAINS--BEEPING HORNS, ETC.,

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

CUT TO SHOTS OF  
HOUSES AT LOOKOUT  
MOUNTAINS

**NARRATOR (VO):** Increasing populations in the mountains place additional and more widespread stress on the water resources. With increased growth comes the potential for contamination from a variety of sources such as, leaking domestic septic systems, soil erosion from construction near streams, or runoff from more pavement.

SHOT OF PEOPLE ALONG  
THE BIG THOMPSON  
RIVER IN DOWNTOWN  
ESTES PARK

Among the mountain tributaries sampled, concentrations of dissolved solids, suspended sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus were higher in areas with more development.

SHOT OF CLEAR WATER

CUT TO SHOT OF MUDDY  
WATER (HIGH FLOW AT  
CLEAR CREEK)

Dissolved solids are minerals and salts dissolved in water and can affect taste. The amount of suspended sediment determines how muddy a river appears.

CLOSEUP SHOT OF  
GREEN ALGAE STRAND IN  
CLEAN RIVER (MORAINE  
PARK)

Increases in nitrogen and phosphorus can fertilize the river resulting in the growth of nuisance algae which can affect stream aesthetics.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

SHOT OF USGS  
SCIENTIST COLLECTING  
WATER SAMPLE AT  
MORAINE PARK

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
DAVID LITKE  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

CUT TO CLOSEUP OF  
CLEAN WATER FLOWING  
OVER ROCKS (MORAINE  
PARK)

FILLING GLASS OF  
WATER

CUT TO CLOSEUP OF  
TROUT

AUDIO

**NARRATOR (VO):** The effects of mining and increased population on water quality however, are localized geographically and have minimal effect on the overall water quality of rivers in the mountains.

**D. LITKE (SOT):** "Well water quality in the mountain streams in Colorado is generally of excellent quality. Mostly because the source of the water is from pure mountain snowmelt higher in the mountains.

**D. LITKE (VO):** Matter of fact, the water quality is almost as good as distilled water. The water is very low in dissolved solids concentrations and also very low in suspended sediment. And, because the water is so pure you can use it for just about any use. And it also supports a very healthy cold water aquatic habitat."

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

BRET BRUCE SAMPLING  
WELLS IN MOUNTAINS  
AND WRITING DOWN  
INFORMATION

**NARRATOR (VO):** Larger populations in the mountains also means more people use water from wells. Wells typically obtain water from fractures in the bedrock.

SHOTS FROM ABOVE  
CONTINUED

Human activities can alter the natural water quality of ground water which is the major drinking water source for most mountain communities.

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
BRET BRUCE  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

**B. BRUCE (SOT):** "Ground water quality in the crystalline bedrock aquifer is good; We found some naturally occurring constituents, uranium and radon in particular. We did also detect man-made compounds which show that the aquifer is not completely isolated from human impacts."

AERIAL SHOT OF RIVER  
IN MOUNTAINS AS IT  
GOES OUT INTO THE  
PLAINS

**NARRATOR (VO):** Although water quality in the mountains show signs of being affected by human factors, these influences are much less dramatic than the influences on the water resources once they leave the mountains.....

FADE OUT TO MAP

MUSIC UP

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

SOUTH PLATTE RIVER  
MAP HIGHLIGHTING THE  
FOOTHILLS/TRANSITION  
ZONE

**GRAPHIC # 4b** file:  
videograph4b.eps

MUSIC OUT

AERIAL SHOT OF RIVER  
LEAVING WATERTON  
CANYON AND  
MEANDERING BEFORE  
REACHING CHATFIELD

**NARRATOR (VO):** As the South Platte River and its tributaries leave the mountains and move towards the plains ... they flow through a transition zone. Changes in the rivers are dramatic... as the channels flatten and the water slows down.

SHOTS OF DIFFERENT  
FISH SPECIES  
HOLDING UP CARP  
SUCKERS ON  
MEASURING BOARD  
OTHER SMALL FISH AT S.  
PLATTE AT DENVER SITE

Changes in the rivers' pace mean natural changes for life in and along the rivers. The water warms up as it leaves the mountains, so fish communities also change. Coldwater species like rainbow and brown trout give way to carp, suckers, minnows, and other warm-water varieties.

MAP WITH POPULATION  
OF THE FRONT RANGE  
URBAN CORRIDOR  
HIGHLIGHTED---**GRAPH  
#4C** file: videograph4c.eps

The temperature change is natural, but other changes to the rivers are not. It is in this transition zone, that the South Platte River and its tributaries run through the most densely populated part of

OVERLAY SHOTS AERIAL  
SHOTS OF BEAR CREEK

Colorado--the Front Range urban corridor.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

FOUNTAIN AT DENVER  
WATER

SHOT OF CONFLUENCE  
PARK AREA WITH BIKERS,  
WALKERS

SHOT OF EFFLUENT

DIVERSION FOR  
IRRIGATION

AERIAL SHOT OF DENVER  
METRO AREA

AERIAL SHOT OF SOUTH  
PLATTE RIVER AS IT  
FLOWS INTO CHATFIELD  
RESERVOIR

AERIAL OF CHATFIELD  
DAM FROM RESERVOIR  
CUT TO BEAR CREEK  
DAM

AERIAL OF CHATFIELD  
DAM FLIGHT OVER DAM  
TO SEE STRAIGHT  
CHANNEL

**NARRATOR (VO):** Here the rivers are used for recreational activities, such as walking, biking, and floating; disposal of domestic and commercial waste-waters and to a lesser extent for water supplies for irrigation.

To demonstrate urban effects on the South Platte River, the largest urban center---the Denver Metro area ---is used as an example.

As the South Platte leaves the mountains at Waterton Canyon, it flows toward Denver into Chatfield Reservoir.

Construction of Chatfield, Cherry Creek, and Bear Creek dams have greatly reduced the threat of flooding in the Denver area.

These dams provide safety for the people who live downstream along the river, but at the same time, they alter the river's natural character.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

CONTINUED AERIAL OF  
CHATFIELD RESERVOIR

CUT TO AERIAL OF  
CONFLUENCE PARK  
WHERE CHERRY CREEK  
ENTERS SOUTH PLATTE

CUT TO CONFLUENCE OF  
BEAR CREEK WITH  
SOUTH PLATTE

SHOT OF EFFLUENT

CUT TO AERIAL OF  
DIVERSIONS REMOVING  
WATER FROM STREAM

MAKING COFFEE

SHOT OF COMMERCIAL  
WATERING

SHOTS OF SPRINKLERS  
WATER SOCCER FIELD

AERIAL SHOT OF DENVER  
METRO WASTE-WATER  
TREATMENT PLANT

CUT TO CLOSEUP OF  
METRO OUTFLOW TO  
STREAM

AUDIO

**NARRATOR (VO):** The amount of water in the South Platte River within the Denver Metro area is controlled by the release of water from Chatfield, the addition of water from tributaries, such as Cherry Creek and Bear Creek, and inflow of waste-water...

...water is withdrawn from the river for irrigation and cooling waters for power generation.

Denver like most urban areas obtains its drinking water from mountain sources. However, the wastewater from uses such as, bathing, cooking, washing clothes and dishes, flushing toilets, and watering lawns, is disposed of through a communal sewer systems and is treated at waste-water treatment plants. The treated effluent is then returned back to rivers.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

CUT TO AERIAL OF  
BURLINGTON DITCH  
SHOWING ALMOST NO  
FLOW IN RIVER  
DOWNSTREAM OF  
DIVERSION

AERIAL SHOTS  
CONTINUED

CUT TO AERIAL OF  
DENVER METRO WASTE-  
WATER SUPPLYING  
ALMOST ALL FLOW TO  
RIVER.

CLOSEUP OF DRIPPING  
PIPES NEXT TO THE  
RIVER

AUDIO

**NARRATOR (VO):** The combination of the amount and source of water can have a profound effect on the river.

For example, when demand for irrigation water is highest, water is diverted, leaving the river nearly dry before it reaches the Denver metro area's major waste-water treatment plant.

That means that during some parts of the year when streamflow is low, almost all of the water in the river immediately below the plant is treated effluent.

Water quality in urban areas can be affected by two sources of contamination to the river, point and non-point sources.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

OUTFLOW BY SOUTH  
PLATTE AT DENVER SITE

**NARRATOR (VO):** Point sources are from pipes or outflows from waste-water treatment plants, factories, or urban drains.

CUT TO MORE PIPES

Point sources can cause water-quality problems ...but they're also the easiest to identify and control.

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
BOB ERICKSON, PhD  
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION AGENCY,  
REGION 8

**BOB ERICKSON (SOT):** "The Clean Water Act came into effect in 1972. Congress gave to States the right to control their own water quality with EPA as oversight. They also gave to the states the right to have permit limits to put on all point sources that went into the river. EPA oversees the States, the State oversees the dischargers. I kayak and canoe the South Platte river for about 45 miles. Twenty years ago--no way."

CUT TO SHOT OF SIGN  
SAYING RIVER CLOSED

**B. ERICKSON (VO):** There was raw sewage dumping directly into the South Platte River. To go in there you actually risked your life.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

CUT TO PEOPLE NEAR  
AND AROUND THE RIVER

**NARRATOR (VO):** Since the Clean Water Act was passed, point sources are not as much of a problem as they use to be.

AERIAL SHOTS OF  
WASTE-WATER  
TREATMENT PLANTS  
AT ENGLEWOOD,  
DENVER METRO  
CLOSE UP OF  
METRO, 19TH ST. BRIDGE

Although there have been substantial improvements, twenty five municipal waste-water treatment plants located along the Front Range urban corridor still discharge about seven thousand tons of nitrogen and twelve hundred tons of phosphorus into the river every year.

CLOSEUP OF METRO  
EFFLUENT FOAMING  
DOWNSTREAM

These urban areas contribute treated effluent which dominates the flow in the South Platte River for 60 miles downstream of Denver to near Greeley.

CLOSE UP OF BRIGHT  
GREEN ALGAE ON ROCKS  
AT SOUTH PLATTE RIVER  
AT DENVER

All living things need some nitrogen and phosphorus to grow, but the effects of too much nitrogen or phosphorus in water can trigger rapid algae growth which forms a green scum. As the algae decay, the water can be depleted of oxygen that insects and fish need to live.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

COMMERCIAL WATERING  
LAWNS AND WATER  
FLOWING INTO DRAINS

**NARRATOR (VO):** Water quality is also affected by contaminants entering the river from sources that can't be assigned to a specific location; these are called non-point sources.

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
ROBERT KIMBROUGH  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

**R. KIMBROUGH (SOT):** "Urban storm water runoff is a non-point source to the river that generally has high concentrations of compounds such as trace metals and household pesticides."

CONSTRUCTION SITE  
ALONG RIVER IN DENVER

OILS ON PARKING LOTS

OILS WASHING INTO THE  
DRAIN

**NARRATOR (VO):** Other non-point sources include sediment from construction sites, ...oils, grease and dissolved metals from paved areas...all of which can wash into streams.

CLOSEUP OF FERTILIZING  
LAWN

COMMERCIAL  
APPLICATION OF  
CHEMICALS

PAN UNDER CAR

DOG IN PARK

Non-point sources also can affect groundwater. Over-application of fertilizers and pesticides, dumping of car fluids, and improper disposal of chemical and animal waste all pose a contamination source to groundwater.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

CUT TO PETE AND BRET  
SAMPLING WELLS IN  
DENVER

**NARRATOR (VO):** This is particularly true for the alluvial aquifer that is located along and is connected to the river. Because the aquifer is connected to the river, contaminants that enter groundwater can end up in the river.

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
PETE MCMAHON, PhD  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

**P. MCMAHON (SOT):** "The alluvial aquifer in Denver is susceptible to contamination from the land surface because we have a shallow depth to groundwater here and the soils are very sandy, so the contaminants can move quickly from the land surface to the aquifer."

CUT TO PUMPING OF GAS  
INTO CAR AND DRIPPING

**P. MCMAHON (VO):** "Shallow groundwater in Denver is characterized by high dissolved solids and by trace concentrations of a variety of pesticides and volatile organic compounds such as gasoline components and cleaning solvents. All of those are from human sources; however, the aquifer also has high concentrations of radon and uranium which are from natural sources."

SHOT OF GAS AND OIL  
ON PARKING LOT

FADE TO AERIAL SHOT  
OF BEAR CREEK

MUSIC BREAK

## "South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

### VIDEO

### AUDIO

AERIAL OF BEAR CREEK  
SHOWING VEGETATION

**NARRATOR (VO):** Human activities can affect not only the water chemistry, but also the natural habitat.

CUT TO AERIAL OF  
CHERRY CREEK  
SHOWING CONCRETE  
WALLS AND NO  
VEGETATION

In many areas, the natural habitat along the stream banks is gone because of channelization to control flow or bank stabilization to control erosion. These areas would normally support plant and animal life in and along the river.

CLOSEUP OF RIP-RAP ON  
BANKS

VIEW OF CREW  
PREPARING TO  
ELECTROFISH SHOWING  
DROP STRUCTURES, PIPE  
WITH EFFLUENT

Alteration of natural habitat, and point and non-point sources, can affect the river's biological health.

USGS ELECTROFISHING  
CREW COLLECTING FISH  
AT SOUTH PLATTE AT  
DENVER SITE

Whereas water samples provide a snapshot of water quality at a moment in time, analyses of fish can assess water quality over several years.

MEASURING AND  
WEIGHING FISH AND  
RECORDING  
INFORMATION

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
CATHY TATE, PhD  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

**C. TATE (SOT):** "The fish communities are sensitive indicators of water quality in that physical or chemical changes in the river will affect the types of fish you find, the size of fish that you find, and the relative abundance of the fish."

COLLECTION OF ALGAE  
WHERE ALGAE VISIBLE  
ON ROCKS

**NARRATOR (VO):** Fish are just one measure of a river's health and it's ability to sustain life.

Scientists also collect less conspicuous life forms like algae and insects. These life forms provide

COLLECTION OF INSECTS

food for fish and can carry a wealth of information about water quality.

CLOSEUP OF  
INVERTEBRATES

The USGS study found that the cumulative effect of contaminants and loss of habitat in urban areas decreased the number of insect and fish species in the river. Only tolerant species, like suckers and carp, could thrive in this environment.

CLOSEUP OF SUCKERS

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

CLOSEUP OF  
PROCESSING OF CARP  
FOR CONTAMINANTS AT  
SOUTH PLATTE AT  
DENVER SITE

**NARRATOR (VO):** Analyzing fish tissue can help detect long-term contaminants in the urban setting. For example, compounds, like PCB's and chlordane are still present in fish tissue even though the use of these chemicals were banned in the 1970s and 80s.

CARP BEING WEIGHED,  
DISSECTED, AND LIVER  
BEING REMOVED

FADE OUT

SOUND TRANSITION

AERIAL OF DAMS

**NARRATOR (VO):** Urban development has resulted in many different effects on the river. By the time the South Platte leaves the Front Range urban corridor, much of the water has been used at least once...treated, and returned to the river. This recycling of water has decreased the water quality compared to that in the mountains; but the water is still suitable for some downstream uses...in the plains.

CHANNELIZATION,

CUT TO CLOSEUP OF  
RIVER CHANNEL

DIVERSION OF FLOW

EFFLUENT FROM WASTE-  
WATER TREATMENT  
PLANT

FADE TO MAP OF SOUTH  
PLATTE RIVER WITH  
PLAINS REGION  
HIGHLIGHTED---  
**GRAPHIC # 4d**  
file: videograph1.eps

MUSIC UP IN FULL AND DOWN

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

AERIAL EXPANSIVE SHOT  
SHOWING BRAIDED  
CHANNELS

**NARRATOR (VO):** The plains is the area of the South Platte River Basin east of Greeley...here the river assumes its third and final geographic personality.

CUT TO AERIAL WHEN  
HELICOPTER IS DOWN IN  
THE STREAM CHANNEL  
AND WATCH BARS, LOGS,  
TREES GOING BY.

The river meanders along its course... ...water moves slowly as the terrain flattens ... braided channels begin to form and the channel bottom becomes sandy. This is the beginning of a 200-mile journey through the plains.

FADE TO

SOUND BREAK

AERIAL SHOTS OF  
FARMLANDS/FARM  
HOUSES

**NARRATOR (VO):** In this part of the basin, agriculture is the primary land use, and the operation of thousands of farms requires large amounts of water.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

SERIES OF AERIAL OF  
DITCHES/ HEADGATES

DITCH GOING TO  
RESERVOIRS

SHOT OF RESERVOIR(S)

SHOT OF FARMER  
HARVESTING POTATOES

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
PETE MCMAHON, PhD  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

**NARRATOR (VO):** Water is removed from the river and channeled through an extensive network of ditches and canals. Water is allocated according to state law based upon a priority system. Water use for any year is determined by how much water is in the river and stored in reservoirs.

All together, the river supports more than one million acres of irrigated farmland---crops include corn, sugar beets, potatoes, alfalfa, and many others.

**P. McMahon (SOT):** The aquifer and river that we're studying here in the agricultural area is the same as we studied in the Denver Metro area; however, the water quality problems in the agricultural area are different than those we saw in the Denver area. We see greater occurrence of pesticides and nitrate both of which have agricultural sources.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

CUT TO CLOSEUP OF  
SPRAYING OF  
CHEMICALS

FARMER PLANTING CROP  
(FOOTAGE FROM KANSAS  
VIDEO)

AERIAL OF EXPANSIVE  
VIEW OF CENTER PIVOT  
IRRIGATION SPRINKLERS

SHOT OF FLOOD  
IRRIGATION WITH SIPHON  
TUBES

SHOTS OF RETURN  
FLOWS OR RUNOFF

SHOT OF PIVOT  
IRRIGATION

**NARRATOR (VO):** In the early 1990s, northeastern Colorado farmers used as much as one thousand tons of pesticides, about 40,000 tons of phosphorus, and 200,000 tons of nitrogen to enhance crop production each year.

Much of the cropland is irrigated by ditches...but many thousands of acres are irrigated by sprinklers that use ground water from the South Platte alluvial aquifer beneath the irrigated lands.

Irrigation water from rivers, reservoirs, and aquifers are essential to successful agriculture in the plains. The pathway for greatest recycling of water between river, fields, and groundwater occurs during spring planting and the summer growing season. Here's how it works...

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

ABOVE GROUND  
PROCESSES, CENTER  
PIVOT AND DIVERSION OF  
STREAM

**GRAPHIC**--files: tate#.ai  
(where # = 1,2,3,3.5,4.0,  
4.1)

CARTOON SHOWING  
UNDERGROUND  
PROCESS, FILTER  
THROUGH SOIL,  
GROUNDWATER AND  
BACK TO STREAM---

**GRAPHIC**-- files: tate dia #  
(where # = 1-4)

AERIAL OF CATTLE IN  
FIELD

CUT TO AERIAL OF  
FEEDLOT

CUT TO DRIVING ALONG  
FEEDLOT SHOWING THE  
LARGE NUMBER OF  
CATTLE

CUT TO DAVE LITKE  
TAKING WATER SAMPLE  
AT SOUTH PLATTE RIVER  
AT BALZAC

AUDIO

**NARRATOR (VO):** Fields are irrigated with water that's either pumped from the aquifer or diverted from the river ... water not used by crops or evaporated then filters down through the soil to the water table carrying with it agricultural chemicals....the groundwater along with the dissolved chemicals eventually flows back to the river to be diverted to crops and used again downstream.

The South Platte's water also is used for livestock. About 1.7 million cattle and about 400,000 hogs were raised in the basin during 1992.

Both land use and water use affect water quality.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

USGS SCIENTIST  
PROCESSING WATER  
SAMPLE

**NARRATOR (VO):** The USGS study found higher suspended sediment in river water in the plains than in urban areas. The suspended sediments were primarily from stream bank erosion or runoff from agricultural fields.

CLOSEUP OF BANK  
EROSION

CUT TO AERIAL OF FIELD  
ADJACENT TO THE RIVER

SPRAYING OF  
CHEMICALS ON FIELDS

Although present in low concentrations, twenty commonly used pesticides were detected in river and ground water. Some pesticides were also detected in streambed sediments and fish, including DDT, which was banned in 1972.

CLOSE UP OF WAVES IN  
SAND

CUT TO SHOT OF CARP  
OR SUCKER

USGS SCIENTIST  
SAMPLING WELLS

Dissolved solids and nitrate concentrations were higher in river water and ground water in the plains than in other parts of the basin.

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
DR. PETE MCMAHON  
U.S. GEOLOGICAL  
SURVEY

**P. MCMAHON (SOT):** "High concentrations of nitrate in the agricultural area are a particularly sticky problem because the sources of nitrate are distributed over large geographic area."

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

SERIES OF AERIAL  
SHOWING EXPANSE OF  
AG FIELDS, FEEDLOTS,  
FARM HOUSES

CUT TO BRET AND PETER  
ANALYZING GROUND  
WATER SAMPLES

CUT TO CLOSEUP SHOT  
OF FARMHOUSE IN THE  
PLAINS

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
RICHARD PARACHINI  
COLORADO DEPT. OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
ENVIRONMENT  
SOUTH PLATTE  
WATERSHED  
COORDINATOR

AUDIO

**P. MCMAHON (VO):** In addition, our studies have shown that once nitrate gets into the groundwater it can take anywhere from 10 to 25 years for that ground water to discharge to the South Platte River. This is important because it means that any implementation of better management practices at land surfaces today, may take decades before they show any improvements in ground water quality."

**NARRATOR (VO):** In general, the chemical analyses of water indicates that water quality is acceptable for agricultural uses.

However, high nitrate concentrations can affect the use of groundwater for a drinking water supply in some areas.

**R. PARACHINI (SOT):** "We do know of some areas in along the South Platte River beginning in the Denver Metro area and extending clear to the State line out by Julesburg where we have elevated nitrate levels in groundwater "

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

SHOT OF PERSON  
DRINKING WATER (FROM  
KANSAS VIDEO)

**NARRATOR (VO):** Although nitrate generally is not a concern for adults, drinking water high in nitrates can cause low oxygen levels in the blood of infants, a potentially fatal condition.

AERIAL SHOT OF SMALL  
TOWNS

If drinking water supplies become contaminated with high nitrate concentrations, small communities or individual homeowners are faced with two expensive options; either treat the water to remove the nitrates or find a new, uncontaminated water supply.

CUT TO INDIVIDUAL  
FARMS

FADE TO

AERIALS SHOWING  
EXPANSE OF RIPARIAN  
VEGETATION WITH OLD  
CHANNELS AND HOW  
SMALL CHANNELS ARE  
THAT HAVE FLOW

**NARRATOR (VO):** Dams and diversions that regulate flow have affected water quality in the plains region and have affected the natural habitat in and along the banks of the river.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

SHOTS ABOVE  
CONTINUED

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
TOM NESLER  
COLORADO DIVISION OF  
WILDLIFE  
AQUATIC NONGAME  
WILDLIFE MANAGER

SHOT OF FISH EATING  
ALGAE IN THE PLAINS

SHOTS OF PLAINS FISH

AUDIO

**NARRATOR (VO):** Spring floods caused by snowmelt in the mountains are no longer common because of flow regulation. The channel is five times narrower than it was over a century ago and there's more vegetation along the channel..and that changes the aquatic habitat.

**T. NESLER (SOT):** "This river has undergone significant, in fact almost complete transformation due to land and water development throughout its history. Of the 28 native fish species we have in the South Platte, ...

**T. NESLER (VO):** ...seven have declined to the point where we now protect them through State listing as threatened or endangered. We've also found out that the diversity of native fish population in the Eastern plains has decreased significantly in the just last 20 years. Fortunately, opportunities still exist for us to restore declining fish species. We can take encouragement in that the recovery effort for the Greenback cutthroat trout in the headwaters of the South Platte have been and are a success and that native fishes in the streams and rivers of the eastern plain still dominate the fish communities."

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

FADE OUT

MUSIC UP IN FULL

SCENIC SHOT OF  
SURFACE OF WATER

MUSIC CONTINUED

"Water is the most critical resource issue of our lifetime and our children's lifetime. The health of our waters is the principal measure of how we live on the land."

--Luna Leopold  
Former USGS Chief Hydrologist,  
& Emeritus Professor of Geology,  
University of California, Berkeley

FISHING IN MOUNTAINS

**NARRATOR (VO):** When you consider the many demands on the South Platte's water, it's not surprising that meeting these demands has caused changes in the river system.

KIDS IN RIVER

WATERING LAWN

IRRIGATION OF FARM

SHOTS IN  
MOUNTAIN  
TRANSITION ZONE  
PLAINS

The quantity and quality of water have been altered all along the river, from the mountains, through the urban transition zone, to the plains.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

SHOT OF STREAMFLOW ALTERATIONS

RESERVOIRS

DIVERSIONS

SCENIC SHOT OF WATER IN MOUNTAINS

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

MINING SHOT

EFFLUENT FROM WASTE-WATER TREATMENT PLANT

PESTICIDE SHOT

SHOT OF GASOLINE DRIP

PEOPLE ALONG THE RIVER IN URBAN AREAS

AUDIO

**NARRATOR (VO):** By regulating natural flows, the network of reservoirs and diversions has provided water supplies for a variety of uses and allowed the extensive use and reuse of water. Land use and the recycling of water have affected water quality throughout the basin.

In the mountains, water generally is of good quality for almost any use; however, increasing populations and past mining have degraded water quality locally.

In the urban transition zone, water quality is affected by contaminants from point sources, such as effluent from waste-water treatment plants, and non-point sources, such as fertilizers, pesticides, and gasoline components; however, water quality does not limit the river's use for recreation or water supplies for irrigation.

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

APPLICATION OF  
CHEMICALS

BANK EROSION IN  
STREAM CHANNEL

SHOT OF STREAMFLOW  
ALTERATION

HABITAT ALTERATION

BIOLOGICAL COMMUNITY

FADE TO

TALKING HEAD  
OVERLAY  
TOM NESLER  
COLORADO DIVISION OF  
WILDLIFE  
AQUATIC NONGAME  
WILDLIFE MANAGER

**NARRATOR (VO):** In the plains, water quality is affected by fertilizers, pesticides, and suspended sediment from erosion of river banks and runoff from fields. While water quality does not adversely affect the use of water for irrigation, in some areas, high nitrate concentrations in ground water can limit its use as a drinking water supply.

In addition, contaminants, flow regulation, and alteration of habitat have decreased the diversity of biological communities in urban and agricultural areas.

AUDIO BREAK/SOUND OF WATER FLOWING

**T. NESLER (SOT):** "As a human society we have to recognize that we are not the only species that relies on the Platte River System for survival."

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

AUDIO

SCENIC SHOT OF RIVER  
AND WATER

**T. NESLER (VO):** "We also have to recognize that our actions affect the physical, chemical, and biological functions of the river and that these actions also have consequences throughout the river system."

MUSIC UP IN FULL FOR THE REMAINDER OF  
THE CREDITS

VIDEO

**OVERLAYS ONTO VIDEO SHOTS**

USGS NAWQA  
PUBLICATIONS ON TABLE

For More Information on the USGS National  
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P.O. Box 25046, MS 415  
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Or Visit the U.S. Geological Survey's South Platte  
Web Site at:  
<http://webserver.cr.usgs.gov/nawqa/splt>

"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

OVERLAYS ONTO VIDEO SHOTS OF BASIN

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"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

OVERLAYS ONTO VIDEO SHOTS OF BASIN

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"South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

OVERLAYS ONTO VIDEO SHOTS OF BASIN

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## "South Platte River--Lifeline of a Region"

VIDEO

OVERLAYS ONTO VIDEO SHOTS OF BASIN

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