

Colorado Basin Roundtable

Meeting Minutes - March 26, 2012

Glenwood Springs Community Center
Glenwood Springs, CO
1-4 pm

Introductions

Handouts

Snowtell graph upper Colorado mainstem – 57%. Its getting ugly....

Dotsero Gauge – rising, as are all the rivers. Early runoff indicated.

Shoshone – one turbine? Not sure where the call is.

CRWCD 75th anniversary poster – available from the River District.

Water and Its Relationship to the Economies of the Headwaters Counties

- A study presentation by the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments' Water Quality and Quantity Committee: Jean Townsend
- Report can be found at www.nwccog.org/index.php/programs/water-qualityquantity-committee/

Lane Wyatt introduced Jean Townsend of Coley/Forrest, Inc., the authors of the report. The study has three purposes: 1) examine the link between water and six headwater counties, 2) describe the link to the rest of the state, 3) describe the compromised economic conditions caused by trans-mountain diversions. Recent attention to adverse impacts from Buy and Dry with agriculture on the eastern slope, leaving an inference that west slope diversions aren't as bad economically, also that maybe we should streamline the approval process for diversion projects. This report balances that point of view. There have been some good mitigation suggestions, but by and large these mitigations do not leave the west slope "whole". The report doesn't take issue with east slope diverters or agriculture.

Headwater counties are unique. On average they are 70% public land. These counties need to make their economy run on the 30% of private land remaining. They are the home of many major world-class resorts. Front range economic boosters like the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce use the mountains and west slope resorts as a tourism "poster child". The West Slope and the recreational/environmental amenities there are vital to the Front Range economy.

There are 45 TM diversions in the state, 16 in headwater counties. PitCo second highest.

Grand County has the greatest diversion of water, Pitkin County is second, followed by Summit, Eagle, Gunnison and Routt counties.

Current stream flow reductions from the Fraser River are 59%, from the Fryingpan 41%, upper Roaring Fork, 37%; Blue River, 24%; Homestake Creek (Eagle River), 51%.

We also have obligations to other states through compacts and treaty with Mexico that limit future water availability. Three estimates based on three different legal interpretations. – source, River District, Eric Kuhn report.

There are significant Environmental Impacts and economic consequences. Lower stream flows, higher temperatures, degradation hamper fishing and gold medal status. Headwater Counties are facing a need to deny rezoning applications due to lack of water. The Front Range has a similar concern for 30-40 years from now. West slope is facing it today.

We need creative, cooperative solutions. Use of 1041 authority is important to local decision making and is an effective tool for negotiating mitigations, although efforts to weaken this authority could come from attempts to “streamline” the approval process.

There are three economic sectors in the headwater counties: Tourism, Agriculture and mineral resource development. 48% of the jobs in Headwater counties are tied to tourism and recreation. In some counties this number is higher. Tourism has a minimal water footprint. Recreation doesn't consume a lot, but depends on a sufficient non-consumptive flows and water.

Primary Residence chart – local, Front Range, other Colorado, out of state. Grand County – 49% are Front Range homeowners. There is a tremendous connection between the Front Range and headwater Counties.

Fishing and hunting economy. 57% of the economic benefits from fishing accrue to the Front Range, 33% of the hunting economy does as well.

Whitewater parks and Reservoirs are a significant part of the recreation economy statewide, and especially in the headwaters.

Stream flow and fishing in the summer is critical to economy. The Upper Colorado and Fraser rivers have been named as Most Endangered Rivers by American Rivers in 2005 and 2010, due primarily to the impacts from trans-mountain diversions.

Grand Lake water quality and clarity is of great concern. Warmer, nutrient laden water associated with the Colorado-Big Thompson and Windy Gap projects are the root of the problem.

Water for snowmaking – very high economic return per acre foot consumed.

Agriculture needs the headwater counties are understated. These needs tend to be more intrinsic and qualitative. Interesting compliment between tourism and agriculture. 73% of private land, on average, is used for agriculture. Winter visitors value agriculture for the view sheds and open space. 54% visitors said they might no

longer come if as little as 25% of agricultural land were developed.

Percent change of agricultural lands 1929-2007; headwaters -9%, eastern plains +23%, statewide, +6%. We need to keep and retain agricultural land, especially in the headwater counties.

There are also complex water and Ag relationships. Agriculture on the West Slope holds many senior rights that can protect us in the event of a Compact Call. Trans-Mountain diversions can cause low flows and irrigation ditch failures in senior West Slope agricultural diversions. Not a water rights point, matter of engineering. There is also a supportive relationship between irrigation and rural residential areas through return flows.

Mineral resource development. Coal, O&G, Moly, Rare Earth

Emerging Issues include facing water demand. West Slope water going to hydraulic fracturing. This is an issue on both sides of the divide.

Water and san districts. Low flows and high temperatures cause discharge-permitting problems. Penalties go to and are paid by the districts, not shared by other trans-mountain diverters.

Key messages.

Front Range and eastern Colorado benefit directly from the West Slope economy.

Water in its natural stream course is essential to our economies

Headwater counties are already compromised by Trans-Mountain diversions

Historic strategies for management may, or may not still work in the future. We may be at an environmental tipping point. Learning by doing is the new strategy for balancing environmental with diversion needs. Future projects should only go forward with close coordination and examination of all impacts.

We need creative management solutions. The rich history of cooperation needs to continue. The goal of information sharing and listening is sound. The Front Range Water Council is receptive to this.

Who is the audience of this report? Public, elected officials, regulators, all of the above. NWCCOG and QQ will be presenting this report to Front Range groups, including ag, state staff, anybody and everybody.

Are there explicit studies of a link between Front Range business recruitment and West Slope amenities? Yes. Front Range Chamber of Commerce surveys on why people live here. Can we get this distilled into an easy to understand metric? Portfolio tool adaptability?

Importance of mitigation; environmental mitigations do have direct social and economic consequences. The West Slope headwater counties need the water more than money.

Portfolio tool fails to measure environmental degradation, recreational impacts, impacts to the west slope, water quality, etc. This is a serious flaw.

Question raised about this report and the Front Range Water Council's economic study and the "value of water". Dollar value reduces water to a commodity. We need to look at all the other costs and values for water and rivers.

Grant Presentation: Eagle River Watershed Council

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Colorado River study: Melissa Macdonald

The Eagle River Watershed Council is asking for money from the CRBRT, through the Water Supply Reserve Account, and letter of recommendation for their proposed Colorado River Inventory and Assessment. Why are we doing it? This will be similar to the Eagle River Inventory and Assessment. That study developed a prioritized list of projects. The Colorado River through Eagle County has been added into the update to Eagle River watershed plan. Through this updating the ERWC realized that there was only limited and piecemeal information on the Colorado River in Eagle County. ERWC wants to hire Brian Bledsoe (CSU) to do an assessment and identify potential projects.

The Colorado River Inventory and Assessment will help identify areas with problems, areas with potential for Non-Consumptive projects and help prioritize rehabilitation strategies. There is a need to move some of the rafting pressure downstream, below McCoy and Catamount. There is also the potential of Oil and Gas leasing north of Gypsum.

ERWC is requesting a grant of \$30,000 from CRBRT to cover two years of work. Support for this project comes from the Eagle County BOCC, TU, Eagle County Open Space Committee. Studies like this also strongly attract other funding for the identified projects because of the specific recommendations, science and benefits. The earlier ERIA study attracted about 7 times the money it took to produce it.

Budget – see grant application

Timeline. Start in July, end December 2013. Expect to have some projects identified by next summer. Should be able to come back to the RT in a year with specific recommendations and partners.

There was a caution on studies as opposed to "shovel" work.

Motion to approve: Rachel Richards, Mike Wujack second. 1, Louis Meyer oppose, 12 in favor. Passed. Letter needed on opposing vote for the IBCC and CWCB. Louis wants to see more hands on projects, not another study.

Nonconsumptive Project Analysis: Report from March 15 Workshop - Lane Wyatt and Ken Neubecker

A workshop was held in Silverthorne on March 15 to describe what the CWCB and CRBRT are looking for in terms of Non-Consumptive projects. We would like to fund 4 or 5 such “shovel ready” projects this year through the Water Supply Reserve Account. Representatives were in attendance with potential projects:

Grand Valley Riparian Restoration Project – Tamarisk Coalition

Ten Mile Creek Restoration Project – Blue River watershed Group

Colorado River Inventory and Assessment – Eagle River Watershed Council

Information was also given on two potential future projects, the Upper Colorado River – Gore Canyon Whitewater Park and a Crystal River Water shed Project (with three distinct project ideas).

The Subcommittee will meet in May to discuss these and other projects that may come in and then report to the BRT in June with a list of projects for decision and vote in July. These projects will be forwarded to the CWCB for consideration at the September Board meeting.

Education Committee Report - Caroline Bradford and Hannah Holm

The Gunnison BRT grant request, similar in scope to the one the CRBRT supported for this work was approved by CWCB last week. A Newsletter was sent out last week. There is also a web site page, through Colorado Mesa University Water Center. The website has lots of info. Feedback says it’s reasonably comprehensible to the “non-water” person. Started talking with papers on writing columns. A list of topics was sent around, looking for writers... A basin Power Point presentation will be posted on the River District FTP site – user name and password – crwcd for both. Site address?

Statewide Roundtable Summit Review

Good attendance at summit. Better than last year, more participation and less “speechifying” from the front. Jacob is working on getting a “proceedings” out. One revelation was that this roundtable process is never going to be over. The collaborative process in this kind of format, BRT/IBCC is feeling permanent. Not necessarily a bad thing.

Concern – there was an assumption that we have more water to develop in the Colorado basin. That might not be true. There was also concern with some of the Governor’s comments.

Concern expressed on the “lets start digging” and quit “studying” emphasis at both the Summit and the previous IBCC meeting. In terms of non-consumptive needs, there is still a lot we don’t know. We need to be careful and not start repeating mistakes from the past in our zeal and haste to build something.

Need to incorporate land use planning and growth considerations. Conservation is not taken as seriously as it should be. Planning for the next 5 million people.

We should take some time out at each meeting to get a better understanding of the various individual IPP’s in the Basin. We also need to better understand other basins

IPP's and how they would impact us. We shouldn't keep the high supply option in our portfolio anymore. Need to focus more on demand.

Revised portfolio scenarios will be used by the IBCC for future scenario planning. New or revised portfolios are due by April 30. We also should create a narrative to go with the portfolio. This will let the IBCC and other RT's know why we did things or what assumptions we were using.

Portfolio tool is wholly inadequate for dealing with non-consumptive needs.

Couldn't figure out how to do it on a site-specific basis, or broader basis.

Galling that west slope water is now relied upon, through return flows, to support east slope environmental needs. Need to add that in the tool.

Need to reconvene the Portfolio tool committee to meet the April 30 deadline.

Reports

Approve Minutes – minutes from February meeting approved

CWCB – two grants were approved – Dennis Reich and grand valley, and the swan river project.

IBCC – Carlyle Currier or Stan Cazier

Flaming Gorge – will meeting tomorrow at Hotel Denver. The public is invited and welcome.

Next Meeting - April 23

May meeting on the 21st, 3rd Monday, due to the Memorial Day Holiday falling on the fourth Monday of May.

Rachel Richards spoke about the Governors TBD process. Need people to self nominate from the Basin. Encourage as many as possible to engage.

Dismiss – although, as usual, discussions continued...