

**Interbasin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables
Rio Grande Interbasin Roundtable**

MINUTES

April 10, 2012 @ 2:00 – 5:00 P.M.

Attending: *Paul Robertson, Ed Nielsen, Dale Wiescamp, Stan Moyer, Charles Spielman, Allen Brown, Travis Smith, Robby Henrikson, Larry Sveum, Charlotte Bobicki, Mike Willett, Erin Minks, Hew Hallock, Nicole Langley, Mike Gibson, Steve Vandiver, Ruth Heide, Marty Asplin, Gary Trujillo, Terri H____, Mario Curto, Ralph Curtis, Leon Moyer, Peter Clark, Mike Hurst, M. McFadden, Gene Farrish, Rio de la Vista, Brenda Felmlee, Judy Lopez, Jim Ehrlich, Craig Cotten, Jeanna Paluzzi, Heather Dutton, Eugene Jacquez, Mike Blenden, AND Steve Harris and his class from Colorado College!*

- **Introductions:** Chairman Mike Gibson welcomed all, especially Steve Harris and his students from Colorado College. Students said hello, hailing from homes all across the US. Mike explained how Colorado's water laws are based on the doctrine of prior appropriation, and how the IBCC's Roundtables are working to preserve water for today and prepare for tomorrow's needs.
- **Approval of Minutes of March 13, 2012:** Charlie Spielman moved to approve; Mario Curto seconded. Unanimous approval as written.
- **Report from Colorado Division of Water Resources – Division 3 Engineer, Craig Cotten:** Mike introduced Craig and explained DWR and Divisions to the students. Craig had met with them already this morning, so they were prepared. Mike and Craig expressed appreciation to Steve Harris and for these young people's interest and involvement in water issues!

SNOTEL report for the Rio Grande Basin – The Rio Grande this year is significantly lower than last year, which was pretty bad. 2009 and 2010 were not too bad, with the highest peak in 2010, but we've been losing snow earlier in the season every year. We've seen a huge decline significantly early due to warm temperatures and dust-on-snow. This decreases the albedo (rate at which heat is reflected back into the atmosphere), increasing temperatures and causing snow to melt faster. Our snowpack is now at 51% of average.

NRCS annual forecast for the Rio Grande is 465,000 AF, or 71% of the long term average. Out of this, the downstream obligation is for 116,500 AF, or a current delivery obligation of 9%. That's what we're curtailing now. On the Conejos the upper index is 215,000 AF, which is 65% of the long term normal. The obligation to downstream states is 54,000 AF. Although we did get some precipitation later in March and early April, the current delivery obligation requires curtailing at 6%.

The outlook for Colorado is dismal, with no place in the state going to have a good water year. We started off this winter with a pretty good snowpack, but in February the snow stopped. The recent heavy snowfalls show up as a blip on the otherwise sharply declining line. We usually don't see this kind of decline for another month. The National Weather Service calls for below average precipitation for the next three months.

Downstream conditions are no better. Elephant Butte and Caballo Reservoirs are only about 20% of their capacity of 410,000 AF. By the end of the year the 282,000 AF of usable compact water

currently in storage will probably be almost gone. This drought is being felt below those reservoirs all the way to Mexico, with irrigators likely to get only half of their usual 790,000 AF of usable water per year. We are in Article VII restrictions, so we can't store in any post compact reservoirs. All usable water will be out of those reservoirs by the end of the year.

The trial of the New Mexico v. Bureau of Reclamation case is scheduled for early fall. Craig went over the nature of the law suit again (see March Minutes) for the students' benefit.

➤ **Please come to this meeting!** On April 19 the State Engineer, Dick Wolfe, will hold a hearing to take comments and receive arguments for and against the Subdistrict #1 Annual Replacement Plan. This will be a formal hearing, so you must sign in if you plan to comment. Comments will inform the State Engineer in making his decision. If approved, the Plan will go into effect May 1. Approval of the annual replacement plan for the San Luis Valley's first water management Sub-district is the final step before the sub-district begins putting water into the system to begin repairing damages from well pumping to surface water users, to the aquifer, and to the Rio Grande Compact.

➤ **Instream Flow – Amy W. Beatie, Esq. Executive Director, Colorado Water Trust (CWT):** After explaining the formation and organizational structure of CWT, Attorney Amy Beatie described water trusts as a market-based, voluntary streamflow restoration program. CWT developed a critical stream list after the 2002 drought, when extremely low flow and warm temperatures threatened aquatic ecosystems. Some stream segments did not have sufficient water for instream flows (ISF) to be maintained during the 2002 drought. To try and prevent similar issues this summer, CWT will facilitate short-term leases of water from agricultural users to keep flows at levels deemed adequate to ensure stream health. "We are testing totally new waters here," said Amy. "We're putting our own cash into the program and our goal is to raise \$500,000." Funding comes exclusively from private sources, with no state money going toward the program.

The program's efforts include permanent acquisitions of water, leases of water and physical solutions that achieve water conservation benefits. With its staff of water lawyers and experts, CWT provides technical assistance and serves as a resource for land trusts and land conservation communities as they encounter the intersection between land and water conservation. The program works with willing donors, sellers, and lessors of water to restore streamflows, acquiring water by donation, purchase, lease, or other contractual agreement, on a permanent or temporary basis. Linda Bassi heads up the program within CWCB – Mike, to the students, "Remember, this is a voluntary program".

➤ **Drought & Climate Change - Taryn Hutchins-Cabibi, Technical Specialist for CWCB's Drought Program:** Taryn spoke to the RT about a year ago about CWCB's Drought Program and its drought planning work. Every part of Colorado is listed in the US Drought Monitor as being in some level of drought condition, with one of the driest Marches on record. She described extreme drought conditions in Texas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. "We're not yet in freak-out mode, but the picture looks less and less hopeful, with drought areas expanding across the state." The US Drought Monitor is used by the Farm Service Agency to determine whether a County can declare a disaster. Last year the Drought Implementation Plan opened up some emergency grazing lands. Taryn explained the monitoring process and how impact task forces are activated. Last year the most severely impacted areas were South Central and South Eastern Colorado. "We were able to get a disaster declaration drafted, signed by the Governor and sent to the feds all in one day."

The municipal sector is starting to get very anxious. Last year some reservoirs got drawn down. "Meeting next week with DNR and DOLA, we're hoping to expedite getting assistance out to towns and counties asking for help, mostly from US Farm Bill and some state funds."

Colorado now ranks 8th highest in the nation for SURE payments (Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments). SURE provides financial assistance for crop production and/or quality losses due to natural disaster. Taryn.hutchins-cabibi@state.co.us also <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=diap&topic=sure>

CWCB is sponsoring a Statewide Drought Conference September 19-20, 2012 open to all. Watch for email. <http://cwcb.state.co.us/watermanagement/drought/Pages/2012CWCBStatewideDroughtConference.aspx>

Need for more weather & precipitation data and feedback! We know the US drought monitor is a great tool, but there's spotty coverage in many areas that are severely impacted. Having few weather stations means much of what we're getting isn't representative of what's really going on. Oklahoma and Texas gather lots of observer feedback, but in Colorado we need help from folks on the ground – give us data, more information. Please sign up!

Peter Clark mentioned the CoCoRaHS program, encouraging participation. Contact Peter or see <http://www.cocorahs.org/state.aspx?state=co>. Also, Wendy Ryan of CSU's Colorado Climate Center is compiling Storm Prediction Center data. <http://ccc.atmos.colostate.edu/> CSU's Drought Program commissioned CSU to do a study of economic impacts of drought. Ironic note on computer models: some models show a net positive benefit of drought due to the "economic benefit" of feedlot auctions ☺! As we start to capture impacts we can know more about resiliency. <http://cwcb.state.co.us/water-management/drought/Pages/2011DroughtResponse.aspx>

RT Farmers, Ranchers, Everyone --- PLEASE Fill out the CSU Survey Here!!! https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Drought_Survey ("Your response is valued. We appreciate you taking time out of your busy day to complete this Internet survey. It should take about 20 minutes to complete. Please attempt to answer every question in the survey. ... There may be no direct benefit to you for participating in this research; however, every response will help provide a clearer picture of the true impact of the Colorado drought.")

Discussion: Farm Bill money and other pots of money will expire soon if not renewed. Charlotte -- USDA has extended a little time. Erin – Senator Udall signed a joint letter calling on members to pass the Farm Bill and not let these funds expire. Judy – Possibly the Farm Bill will get a 90 day extension, with Congress possibly going into an extended session. Jeanna – What about Subdistrict #1 fallowing ? Steve -- There were about 10,000 acres under CREP contract for fallowing. Some of these opted out in favor of getting prevented planting payments instead because they could get \$500-\$600 per acre instead of the subdistrict's \$200-300 per acre. They hope to get about 30,000 acres out of production this year, "and that's just in Subdistrict #1."

Questions: Will these programs help farmers put in cover crops? Taryn -- CWCB has an Ag augmentation program. Judy - If cover crops are blown away, what funding is available? Taryn said she would look into what happens if they come out of conservation plan compliance because they've lost the cover crops. She will see what funding might help them re-seed.

➤ **“The San Miguel Hanging Flume – Unaweeep – Tabequache Scenic Highway”** – Slide Show and talk, Jerald Reid, Historian, Grand Junction - Jerald told how Nathaniel Turner and his crew, in three years in the late 1880s, built a hanging flume across seven miles of sheer rock walls, suspended hundreds of feet above the river. www.hangingflume.org.

➤ **Nonconsumptive Use Projects – Rio de la Vista:** Rio described how non-consumptive uses are increasingly being recognized in Colorado as including both environmental and recreational uses. Here in the Valley we’ve done a good job of combining the two, plus gaining a wider understanding that consumptive uses, such as irrigation, often produce nonconsumptive benefits. Rio acknowledged and thanked Amy Beatie for her strong support to RiGHT in conserving land and hopefully preventing the loss of flows in the river. “At The Nature Conservancy meeting the other day, the Rio Grande Basin showed great collaboration, with everyone working together.” Rio thanked Paul for representing us well at that meeting.

Please contact Rio if you have a nonconsumptive purpose in the Rio Grande Basin, as that may open the door to potential funding sources. We want to get the most we can out of the funds we get for meeting nonconsumptive needs. riovista@rmi.net

➤ **“Water 2012” - Judy Lopez and Leah Opitz** – the Adams State College Environmental Action for Resources, Transportation and Health (EARTH) Week, April 16 through April 22, includes keynote speaker Nolan Doesken, state climatologist.

The Arkansas River Basin Water Forum is taking place at the Climax-Molybdenum Leadership Center at Colorado Mountain College in Leadville. Check out the website (www.arbwf.org) for details on lodging and registration. Judy and Leah will be there showing off our stuff from our basin along with our reservoir display. Lots of cross basin stuff. www.water2012.org

Be sure to take advantage of the grant funds for Water 2012 tours on May 7, July 14, July 18, Aug 11, 23, Sept 7, Sept 8. Judy will send announcements to Mike so Mike can distribute to the RT. Register on the website www.water2012.org. Water 2012 is holding a statewide video contest “A Day Without Water,” so send your entries to the website. A K-12 photography and poetry contest through River of Words involves kids learning about drought. Contact Judy judy.lopez@co.nacdn.net or Leah Opitz lopitz15@gmail.com 307-258-8255.

➤ **Report from the Interbasin Compact Committee – Steve Vandiver/Travis Smith:** Travis thanked all who went to the summit. A summary of the breakout sessions, table discussions, next steps, and a short slide show summarizing the portfolio analysis are all here: <http://cwcb.state.co.us/about-us/about-the-ibcc-brts/Pages/2012StatewideRoundtableSummit.aspx> Next IBCC meeting will be in May. Now, after six years, the Roundtable process has provided Director Stulp and Governor Hickenlooper many tools for coming up with solutions for Colorado’s water future. We’ll be talking about the results of the Summit and what role the State will play in getting us to implementation.

➤ **Senator Entz Honored:** Mike sent out a notice about the April 20 award ceremony in which former State Senator Lewis H. Entz and State Rep. Diane Hoppe will be honored as co-founders of the Colorado Foundation for Water Education (CFWE), receiving the President’s Award at the Colorado Governor’s Mansion. The ceremonies will be part of the CFWE’s 10th anniversary.

➤ **Update on Oil & Gas Drilling - Rio Grande County – Dale Wiescamp:** There is growing concern in Rio Grande County about future actions by the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC). Long term, the towns of Del Norte and Monte Vista could see more applications for oil production if restrictions are not put in place on the activities of First Energy Corporation on private land owned by L.G. Moseley. This is about four miles northwest of the Del Norte Airport and 1.5 miles from the landmark Natural Arch.

The site of concern is near the capped and idle Jyniffer Well, near Old Woman's Creek. That well was shut down in 1987 after producing a small amount of oil. Three tanks on the property hold several thousand gallons of oil. Dale has reported to the Roundtable before about these tanks dripping into the ground. First Energy Corporation, out of Florida, is going through the Oil & Gas Commission review process now and we have until April 20 to submit comments to the State. The area has been designated as sensitive for pronghorns, so completion of the process has been delayed until mid-June. But the fear is that they might start drilling before then.

Please come to this meeting! Chris Canaly, of the San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, and Rio Grande Land Use Planner Rose Vanderpool are hosting a meeting this Thursday April 12 at Wildwood Sounds in Del Norte, and they urge all concerned citizens to come. To a question on the timeline, Rose – We will not accept a conditional use application until a developer has gone through all the state requirements -- depends on how fast the State moves. Hughes is still being reviewed. The County timeline is about 180 days or less.

➤ **Rio Grande Stakeholders Meeting –** Heather invites all to attend the 3rd Annual Rio Grande Stakeholders Meeting Monday, May 7 starting at 8 AM and Tuesday May 8, ending at 5 PM (same day as the RT meeting). The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) will discuss partnerships, projects, and USACE authorities that apply to the Rio Grande. The program includes speakers and tours to a potato and barley farm, the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge, and local conservation and river restoration sites. The USACE will also discuss environmental restoration authorities and provide an update on the Rio Grande Environmental Management Plan (RGEMP). Reply before May 1 to Heather at HeatherRDutton@gmail.com or 719-589-2230 or to Alicia Austin Johnson of USACE at Alicia.M.AustinJohnson@usace.army.mil or 505-342-3635.

Future Meetings – Other Business: Eugene Jacquez asked if he could represent Costilla County. Mike welcomed the idea and told Eugene he would need to get a letter from the County Commissioners appointing him.

**Next Meeting: May 8, 2012
Ramada Inn Formally Inn of the Rio Grande, East Highway 160
Alamosa, Colorado**