

Interbasin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables

Rio Grande Interbasin Roundtable

MINUTES February 11, 2014

Attending: *Charles Spielman, Dale Wiescamp, Bob Kirkham, Marty Asplin, Ron Brink, Peter Clark, J.B. Alexander, Mario Curto, Stan Moyer, Jim Rutgers, Tom Spezze, Jay Winner, Judy Lopez, Travis Smith, Rio de la Vista, Courtney Hurst, Mike Blenden, Heather Dutton, Brendan Rocky, Eugene Jacquez, C. Simpson, David Bradley, Robert Mathis, Greg Higel, Don Thompson, Adam More, David Warsh, Rob Phillips, Eugene Farish, J. Cantu, Suzanne Beauchane, Nicole Langley, Matt Gallegos, Ruben Sandoval, Keith Holland, Bea Ferrigno, Joseph B. Old Elk, Cindy Medina, Dale Pizel, Patrick O'Neill, Lawrence D. Gallegos, Dennis Martinez, Brenda Felmlee, Tracy Miller, Rick Basagoitia, Rose Vanderpool, Craig Cotten, Charlotte Bobicki, Mac McFadden*

Introductions/Welcome: Vice Chairperson Rio de la Vista opened the meeting. Mike Gibson, Chairman was not able to attend.

Announcements: The CWCB 2014 Statewide Basin Roundtable Summit will be March 6 from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the Denver West Marriott – Phone 303-279-9100 for reservations. Free to RT members and \$75 for nonmembers. Some scholarships are available for members. Rio will send out more information.

The Water Leadership Cass is coming up again March 24 to 28. Applications are available on the RGWCD website. Applications due end of February.

- **Approval of the Minutes of January 14, 2014:** It was duly moved and seconded to approve the January Minutes as written. Unanimous approval.
- **Soil Health and Water – Brendon Rocky – Rocky Farms LLC, in Center.** Brendon gave a fascinating “systems view” of new holistic farming methods pioneered by his uncle near Center. He stressed that short term “kill” techniques for farming problems might solve a particular problem short term, but are not sustainable. Long term objectives and a holistic systems view requires a knowledge of the interrelationships – carbon in soil, soil structure, soil biology, etc., and without this approach crops will require lots more water and this creates more weeds. He explained the use of “soil primers” including green manure (crops grown and never harvested but plowed back into the soil), companion cropping, and fertility inputs that are carbon based and therefore more efficient, as they work with the life in the soil. He showed the positive results of farming with a good healthy soil structure from 2006 to 2013: less water per irrigation; lots more carbon in the soil; more timing between irrigations; huge positive effect on fertility; “We used to put 3x as much compost every year, now, with green manure and legumes and increased overall efficiency, we’re down to 1.5 ton compost every other year, because there is so much residual fertility in the soil. We have eliminated parasitic nematodes, using biological control of aphids and different insects.” He plants a ten-species mix of plants in with his potato crop and he likes to use the term “biotic” farming.
- **Update - Rio Grande Basin Water Implementation Plan – Tom Spezze / Kelly DiNatale:** Tom reported on the progress of each of the subcommittee meetings as they work on goals and measureable outcomes. He passed out an input form for everyone to give all an opportunity for comment and input, and copies of the latest draft resulting from the Basin Implementation Plan process. Tom complimented Judy on the public outreach and education effort. Charlie mentioned the need to get our legislators more informed and involved as well as the general public: “When the ROMEOS start

commenting on the Basin Plan I'll know we've educated the public." (ROMEO = Retired Old Men Eating Out!)

On February 26 the Subcommittee drafts will be submitted to the Steering Committee for their review. That will be a working session, so Steering Committee members be sure to attend.

- **Update on BLM and Rio Grande County Oil & Gas Drilling Permits – Rio de la Vista and Paul Tigan, BLM:** The Hughes drilling permit request is on hold. BLM's approved permit is good for 2-3 years, but they still need to go through the Rio Grande County process. The State permit expires in June or July of this year and we don't know whether they have started the extension process. Western Land Services been working hard to put the application together. They were here last week and were told to put it on hold.
- **Report from Colorado Division of Water Resources - Craig Cotten, Division 3 Engineer:** Numbers from NRCS on projected stream flows show the storms during the last week brought the Rio Grande Basin's snowpack up from 77 percent to 87 percent of average, but this basin is still the lowest in the state, with other basins way above 100 percent. Although Rio Grande is still the lowest percent of average in the state, it's better than the 67% we had a couple of weeks ago. March 12 is the next Well Rules Advisory Committee, and they are very close to having the Rules and Regulations done, with the goal of getting the Rules and Regulations out some time this spring. Craig said, "If there are well users, municipalities, etc., or anyone wondering about well usage we are available for consultation. We will work with you any way we can to make this a smooth transition."

The Rio Grande Compact meeting will be March 20th in Santa Fe at the State Capitol Building, with a March 19 reception. DWR will send out notices.

The state of Texas petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to file a lawsuit against New Mexico and Colorado concerning the Rio Grande Compact. The Supreme Court has accepted that lawsuit, so it will now begin moving forward. Colorado is a minor player in the suit at this point but was named because it is part of the compact.

The WildEarth Guardians environmental group filed notice of intent to sue and has 60 days from the time of its notice before it can officially file suit, which would be March 22. That group is alleging violations of the Endangered Species Act protection of the silvery minnow and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, and so far those who may be named in the suit include the State of Colorado, Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Craig said, "They are claiming that the use of water out of the Rio Grande in Colorado is causing some injury to the endangered species in New Mexico. Our position is that we meet our compact obligations each and every year. "

- **Report from IBCC Representatives – Travis Smith and Steve Vandiver:** IBCC will meet on February 18 in preparation for the March 6th Roundtable Summit. IBCC is looking for general acceptance on the new supply issue, but consensus is not easy to reach. They will be discussing the possibility of a ballot initiative on the Public Trust Doctrine (explanation follows per Valley Courier 3/5). There is the potential for a ballot issues to go before voters this fall regarding a constitutional change from the current priority water system to the Public Trust Doctrine. The Public Trust Doctrine would involve a permitting system, and whoever was in charge of the permitting could choose how water would be diverted and for what uses. For example, the most beneficial use of water could be determined to be instream flows in the Rio Grande rather than diversions for agricultural irrigation. If those promoting the ballot initiatives collect enough signatures, the Public Trust Doctrine initiatives would probably appear on the ballots this fall. IBCC's work is important to counteract these kinds of movements.

Tom Spezze has been asked by San Luis Valley County Commissioners and others to put together a coalition to address the US Fish & Wildlife issue of potentially listing the Rio Grande cutthroat trout under the threatened and Endangered Species Act. This is one of 250 other species to be considered for listing. Contact Tom Spezze or Rio de la Vista for details. Colorado sent a strongly worded comment letter stating clearly that the science of Colorado Parks & Wildlife and conservation efforts by Trout Unlimited and others show a consensus that such a listing would not affect the ongoing conservation efforts. Erin Minks: If this species were listed it definitely would impact Valley water users.

- **Update on Sub-District # 1 Issues – Rob Phillips, RGWCD:** Rob explained a correlation they are seeing in Subdistrict #1 between a 12% pumping reduction and changing farming practices within the subdistrict. He has visited with many farmers and will talk with Brendon Rocky about crop rotations and reduced pumping. Subdistrict #1 seeking a change of water use of water from Santa Maria reservoir and other sources that will be used to, make-up depletions. Fisheries are also getting a benefit from reduced depletions. Currently Subdistrict # 1 is releasing 6-7 cfs , or 1900 AF of wet water to the Rio Grande, and the return of more wet water to the river is hoped for as other subdistricts come online. The other side of the decree is aquifer sustainability. Under the CREP program we have 10 temporary and 10 permanent contracts signed up now and there's growing interest for signing up perhaps 15 more. Within 10 years we need to show progress on getting the aquifer up, and we're going in the right direction with these new farming practices. The CREP program is not the best approach, we know. Much better to improve farming practices and thereby reduce pumping – plus hopefully some wetter weather.
- **A Voice from Conejos Water Users:** Rio followed up on the interest of the Conejos River System Water Users Association to participate on the Roundtable. Nicole has been designated Executive Director of this group, which was formed in 2012. She passed out brochures explaining the mission and purposes of CRSWUA and introduced Ruben Sandoval, Vice Chairman, who explained the goals and objectives of their work on the Conejos River system. Ruben has submitted a letter of interest to Mike and Nicole has been designated by their Board of Directors to represent the group on the Roundtable. Actual membership is pending the updating of the Membership roster of the Roundtable, but at this point the Bylaws do not provide membership for water user organizations.
- **RGBRT Membership:** Rio explained that she and Mike and Nicole have been working to update the RT membership list and reconcile it with the Bylaws of the RGBRT. Charlie offered to assist this effort. The membership list will be discussed at a later meeting.
- **Next Meeting:** Trinchera Irrigation Company will Preview their grant request for \$25,000 from WSRA Basin funds at the April meeting. CPW and TU are collaborating to improve wildlife and recreational opportunities at Mountain Home Reservoir State Wildlife Area.

Next Meeting: March 11, 2014
Conference Room, San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District
623 Fourth Street, Alamosa, Alamosa, Colorado

Light Refreshments Will Be Served