

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

MINUTES

May 13, 2014

Attending: *Ron Brink, Ruth Heide, Anne Steinhage, Greg Higel, Erin Minks, Bea Ferrigno, Ann Bunting, Susan Wolfrey, Mario Curto, Joseph B. Old Elk, Rudy Gallegos, John Noffske, Don Torres, Marvin Reynolds, Negussie Tedela, David Montgomery, Emma Regier, Charles O. Spielman, Dale Weiscamp, Dwight Martin, Patrick O'Neill, Ruben Sandoval, Charlotte Bobicki, Ralph Curtis, Larry Brown, Judy Lopez, Keith Holland, Mathew E. Gallegos, Virginia Christensen, "Mac" McFadden, Gilbert Garcia, Lawrence Gallegos, Cindy Medina, Brenda Felmler, Ben Felt, Rep. Edward Vigil, Don Thompson, Jim Ehrlich, Eugene Jacques, Gene Farrish, Annette Aring, Mike Collins, Heather Dutton, Nicole Langley*

Introductions: Vice Chair Rio de la Vista welcomed all. She thanked State Representative Ed Vigil for attending the meeting and his continuing interest in the Valley's water issues. Thanks also to Craig Godbout from CWCB for joining us. Lawrence Gallegos announced that he is "on the Roundtable."

Approval of Minutes of April 8, 2014: Ron Brink moved to approve as written, Charles O. Spielman seconded. Unanimous approval.

Update – "Rio Grande Basin Water Implementation Plan" – Public Input – Kelly DiNatale, DiNatale Water Consultants: Kelly presented an outline of the Rio Grande Basin Plan and explained the State Water Plan process, including the history of SWSI and the roles of the Basin Roundtable Steering Committee and the various subcommittees. He showed slides of annual streamflow 1950-2012 with ten year running averages showing variability in the trending of flows and yes, peak runoff is happening earlier on the Rio Grande and the Conejos River.

Section 1 sets out the RG Basin Goals and Measurable Outcomes; Section 2 presents an evaluation of needs. Although lots of previous CWCB work was completed, and the Basin Subcommittees have done lots of updating, "We must use the SWSI numbers for the base." Subcommittees are still working to clarify issues and fill in the details. All pumping will require augmentation per the State's modeling of pumping depletions and evaluation of agricultural needs. Challenge is to restore aquifer levels and achieve aquifer sustainability.

The Municipal and Industrial (M&I) Subcommittee has done a thorough evaluation of needs, with per capita use numbers being much lower (240) than indicated by previous SWSI studies (314). The M&I Subcommittee has created tables for industrial water use and determined critical problems faced by municipalities from aging infrastructure, needs for augmentation, and potential increases in water quality standards. They identified the possibility of towns getting credit from wastewater recharge. Creating their own individual plans for augmentation will be difficult, so many see the benefit of joining a subdistrict.

Kelly reviewed the work of the Water Administration Subcommittee re the Rio Grande Compact deliveries by volume for the Rio Grande and the Conejos River and the findings of the basin modeling; simulation and validation of historical conditions; evaluation of impacts; importance of basin return flows from irrigated acreage. Getting the return flows right is the main point. Water is used 7 times before it leaves the basin. Getting the timing/amount of those flows right is important. He showed a map of the modeling showing the physical connections where returns to the river are hydrologically possible.

Kelly explained the uses of the model to assess current needs and imbalances, to model changes in hydrology, to help make decisions and prioritize projects, to identify opportunities and constraints. “We don’t want anything like the Platte River Basin. The bottom line of the Plan is to identify projects and methods that we can propose to meet those goals.” The timeline is accelerated – need to get draft to CWCB in July so they can have it to the Governor. Craig Godbout clarified that it must be on the Governor’s desk on December 10, not in October, but the whole plan needs to go to CWCB’s Board first. See www.riograndewaterplan.com/

Discussion: A guest asked “at what point do we move into the future?” Travis engaged this discussion, encouraging this RT newcomer to continue attending our RT meetings. He provided a thorough and cogent outline of rules and regulations dating forward from the 1870’s; the framework of prior appropriations; the strength that comes from having federal compacts; and he explained how we are all working very hard to try to meet today’s and tomorrow’s needs and to preserve the value of agriculture in balance with recreation and the environment. Annette Aring spoke of the RG Roundtable as “a strong voice for water conservation – this basin is way ahead of other basins.” Lawrence spoke of the Catch-22 conundrum posed by center-pivot irrigation which is highly efficient for irrigation, yet this efficiency ends up depleting the aquifer due to lack of return flows, and he also questioned the assumptions made when the RG Compact was negotiated. Travis: “We ought to have a special session on the RG compact.”

“Interview and Survey Research on Water Management in the San Luis Valley: What CU Boulder and Dartmouth are Doing Here and Why” - Kelsey Cody is a graduate student at CU Boulder – he and other graduate students are working on the NSF-funded CNH Snowmelt Project in which researchers at Indiana University and Dartmouth are “trying to understand drought and how human beings respond to drought. With a focus on groundwater and snowmelt, we are also studying this question in Kenya and in the Southwest of the US, with a focus here in the San Luis Valley.” Kelsey passed out copies of a survey, “Our angle is to understand the governance issues – so an analysis of the rules, incentives and resources and see how people historically have adapted. They are reviewing climate, hydrology and runoff studies since 1890, studying tree rings, and they’re finding that “We now have the lowest reconstructed flows in the last 500 years, using tree rings data.” They’re studying how people do or do not work together, how groups of irrigators act collectively in one instance but not in another. Kelsey praised the SLV for high levels of cooperation. Contact Kelsey Cody at 707-333-3776 codykc@colorado.edu

Administrative Issues: Vice Chair Rio suggested that discussion of changes in the RT Bylaws to align with membership objectives should be deferred until a later meeting. Rio will email Nicole regarding current membership list.

Update on Sub-District # 1 Issues – Steve Vandiver – Manager, Rio Grande Water Conservation District Steve explained that Division 3 Engineer Craig Cotten is at an Well Rules and Regulations Advisor’s meeting and cannot attend. The Subdistrict #1 Annual Replacement Plan was submitted to the State Engineer and he approved the plan. “We have a daily obligation to replace depletions to the river, so, with slightly smaller amounts than last year, we’ll continue replacing depletions.” One major change is that six of the major canals on the RG are participating in forbearance this year. This allows us to save the water we have and to pay them money for the impact instead of having to release water from the reservoir. It’s a very positive thing.

Snow Pack & Water Content – Groundwater levels in Subdistrict #1 have remained stable in the past 2-3 months, and only one sprinkler is running today. Recent snows are a good thing: “It’s a several

million dollar storm.” Basin-wide, snowpack was still only at 56% of normal, with less snow south of Hwy 160 and with the San Antonio River only at 20%. Saguache is at 100% and the Rio Grande is still in the low 70s forecast for the year. Recent snows will hopefully help change the soil moisture conditions. Costilla Creek is holding a compact advisors meeting this PM and another one tomorrow. Not sure where we stand on the Earth Guardians, as I have no news on that. Still no date set for the Supreme Court to hear the issues on the annual replacement plan – maybe next fall.

No/Low Regrets Implementation Plan – Take a look at the website notes from Kate Macintyre, Public Outreach Coordinator for the Colorado Water Plan. http://coloradobip.sgm-inc.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/BIP_5_16_14_Draft.pdf. This summarizes the BIP process and target dates. She will post the BIP drafts in the 1st week of July. At the May meeting IBCC will present draft chapters and a progress report on developing a conceptual agreement on no/low regrets implementation plan.

Report from IBCC Representatives – Travis Smith / Steve Vandiver - Lots is going on with IBCC – How to plan for Colorado’s water future. “After 8 years, with 27 of us working on this, there is some agreement breaking out. We’re now seeing some drafts of a conceptual agreement on what a project would look like, how a water transfer from the Western Slope to the Front Range would look like. IBCC is recognizing the needs on the Western slope, recognizing the Colorado River Compact agreement and agriculture needs. We’re asking what risks would be involved, what sort of “insurance” policy would be needed. What might a new trans-mountain diversion look like? Wherever we live, it’s about Colorado’s future, about learning to live within our means”.

Colorado River contingency planning is high priority for CRISP – Colorado River Storage Project – involving what would be required if levels in Lake Powell (of the Upper Colorado Basin) and in Lake Mead (of the Lower Colorado Basin) were to drop too low to operate their hydropower plants. This could happen if conditions don’t improve. [See more at:

<http://m.durangoherald.com/article/20140515/NEWS01/140519669/0/APW/Lake-Powell-could-%E2%80%98call%E2%80%99-on-regional-reservoirs#sthash.4WIHlfB9.dpuf>]

As Travis explained, “Lots of lights would go off.” We’re trying to show the federal agencies that states are still in control for how those reservoirs are being managed. It makes individual states very nervous to have the Fed’s hand on that throttle, so contingency planning talks are going on about potential reoperation of Colorado River storage. “It might not be at the top of OUR list, but it’s high priority on the Colorado River system, and we’re still part of Colorado.”

Action items – Stay informed – make sure we have all information possible on our conceptual points of agreement on contingency planning and future tasks; keep no/low regrets in mind (processes that as a RT and as a state we have general agreement on); stay involved about projects and risk management issues dealing with Colorado’s shared future. Stay informed about [considerations] on developing the undeveloped portion of the Colorado River and Compact issues. The answers aren’t as simple as they might seem.

Erin Minks described the “high level of politicking” that is going on regarding the Colorado River and the condition of Lake Powell’s power pool, with Senators Udall, Feinstein, Harry Reid and many in the senate leading this discussion. “The stakes are a lot higher now than ever.” Heather has a recording of this discussion at the Colorado Water Congress. It’s critical for the state and not the Secretary of the Interior to make those decisions.

Craig Godbout reviewed the RG Basin proposals coming before the CWCB meeting in Pueblo. Nicole explained that the Sanford Canal, the Ephraim Ditch and the East Bend are combined into one WSRA proposal from Conejos Water Conservancy District; in CWCB will also review proposals from the Trinchera Irrigation Company and the SLV Well Owners Association.

Representative Ed Vigil congratulated the Roundtable on its excellent proposals and asked that folks keep in touch with him. "Two-way communication is best!"

<http://www.leg.state.co.us/CLICS/CLICS2013A/directory.nsf/MemberDetailPage?OpenForm&district=62&Chamber=house>

Announcements: Vice Chair Rio suggested we might set a future meeting in Saguache. Be sure to sign up for the Colorado Water workshop in Gunnison at Western State University June 18-20. Scholarships are available for RT members.

Mike Blenden is leaving! Mike has been our fish and wildlife person but he's been promoted and will be going to Denver to manage refuges for Wyoming, Utah and Montana. We're going to miss Mike and Peggy as they have played significant roles in our community for many years. Best wishes, Mike!

[June meeting was subsequently cancelled]

Next Meeting: July 8, 2014

**Conference Room, San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District
623 Fourth Street, Alamosa, Alamosa, Colorado
Light Refreshments Will Be Served**