

## **Interbasin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables**

### **Rio Grande Interbasin Roundtable**

#### **MINUTES**

**September 9, 2014 @ 2:00 – 5:00 P.M.**

### **Saguache County Road and Bridge Department**

**311 3rd Street, Saguache**

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**Attending:** Travis Smith, Craig Godbout, Rio de la Vista, Charlotte Bobicki, Cath Morin, Peter Clark, Ruth Heide, Bea Ferrigno, Erin Minks, Dale Pizel, James Loni, Jan Crawford, Mac McFadden,, Anne Steinhage, Brenda Felmlee, Nathan Coombs, Emma Regier, Michelle Lanzoni, James Henderson, Janet Nelson Cox, Brock Canty, Dwight Martin, J.B. Alexander, Charles Spielman, Nicoe Langley, Dale Wiescamp, Kevin Terry, Ron Riggensbach, Mike Collins, Ed Nielsen, Mike Gibson, Judy Lopez, Tom Spezze, Joseph B. Old Elk, Steve Vandiver, Wayne Schwab

Chairman Mike Gibson called the meeting to order, thanked Craig Godbout from CWCB for being here, established quorum, and welcomed attenders from Saguache. Mike communicated that Heather Dutton is undergoing chemotherapy, but that she is otherwise “doing well.” Mike, Tom Spezze and others expressed concern and good wishes for her quick recovery.

- ✓ Mike G. introduced Michelle Lanzoni, a doctoral researcher from Oxford, who is studying rain events and their effects upon desert soil, including soil moisture and nitrogen cycling and how these affect soil health. She would welcome making contacts in the Valley who can support her investigations. [lanzoni@drylandsresearch.org](mailto:lanzoni@drylandsresearch.org).
- ✓ Approval of Minutes of July 9, 2014 – Steve Vandiver moved to approve as written; Gene Farish seconded. Unanimous approval.
- ✓ WSRA Funding Request: Increasing the Water Holding Capacity of Soils – Judy Lopez and Brendon Rockey - Judy explained the importance of this study of soil health, including plant diversity and other factors. Brendon Rockey explained how he developed a sustainable and profitable farm operation while using less water than a typical commercial operation. The presentation included comparisons of the use of fungicides, fertilizers and other chemicals. The funds will be used to conduct a study to assess the beneficial effects of using biologic additives, multi-species cover crops, and other sustainable techniques. Each producer will get \$5,000 to offset costs. Eight sites will test various techniques using potato, barley and alfalfa crops. The farmers’ match is estimated by the value of giving up regular farming in order to participate in the study, or roughly \$5 Million. The purpose is to establish data on sustainable farming methods based on biologic or biotic practices and examining the effects on water consumption. Mike complimented Rocky on getting international attention in National Geographic and in another publication in New Mexico. “Thanks to Rockey, people know that good things are happening in the San Luis Valley.

VOTE: Rio de la Vista moved to approve funding. JB Alexander seconded the motion. After much discussion, Rio amended the motion to make clear that this study was related to the unconfined aquifer, and Steve Vandiver confirmed that, saying “we need to have a number of things in our toolbox as this drought continues.” Funding for administration was \$18,200, with the rest devoted to the costs of the study. Members unanimously voted to recommend funding.

Mike G. asked Marvin Reynolds, CSU Extension, to be involved and to keep the RT apprised of the study's progress.

- ✓ Legislative Water Resources Review Committee (WRRC) – Mike G. reviewed the visit of legislators and their hosting for lunch and the public meeting at the Inn of the Rio Grande on August 28, 2014. Feedback to legislators on the Rio Grande Basin Water Plan, public input and the presentation all went very well. Ruth Heide did an excellent write-up of their visit in the Valley Courier. Mike G. thanked all for their work on these events.
- ✓ WSRA Funding Request: Continued Efforts to Complete “Rio Grande Water Plan” – Mike Gibson asked members to ratify his letter of recommendation to CWCB to provide additional funds for DiNatale Water Consultants to complete the Basin Water Plan. Many comments were made as to the language in the CWCB draft which was circulated. Travis: “The Executive Summary needs to have our own language in there.” Mike informed members that he had made the executive decision to get the funds approved, because of this Friday’s CWCB meeting.

VOTE: Dale Pizel moved to approve the letter requesting funding. Dale Weiscamp seconded. Charles O. Spielman opposed.

- ✓ Initial Review for WSRA Funding – Conejos Groundwater Monitoring and Analysis – Conejos River System Water Users Association, Brock Canty, President and James Henderson, Secretary of CRSWUA.

Brock introduced the organization and its efforts to help the subdistricts and water plans in the Conejos watershed as they go forward. Our big project now is to get a better understanding on the groundwater network by installing water level transducers in specific local wells. The project will also monitor several wells in the Alamosa/LaJara system, thus helping both subdistricts. Changes in water levels will be monitored at the beginning and at the end of the water season, providing data to analyze the recharge effect in relation to the confined aquifer. There has been very limited monitoring in the Conejos area. “We want to see the effects of pumping in our area and see how they affect the transmissivity and connectivity to other wells in the area and how the aquifer moves.” The transducers, combined with existing surface gauging stations, will help Conejos water users determine the correlation between groundwater effects and surface water. This proposal has been reviewed by the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, which encouraged the project to proceed. RGWCD also wants to put cameras in the wells to have a good look at what is being measured. The main goal is to inform and to help calibrate the State’s groundwater model, making it more representative of the Conejos area.

Brock quoted Kelly Thompson, of the CDWR modeling project, as saying, “....we don’t have enough historical data...” The system will link up with the AMCi gauging stations. The project is working with the State to identify which wells to monitor. RGWCD has pledged \$75,000, with other matching funds from Alamosa/LaJara subdistrict. Basin funds request is \$12,150; State funds are \$127,000. With matching amounts, total project costs are \$243,000.

Mike G. confirmed that CWCB has already funded the Conejos Water Conservancy District's gauging stations project, providing a significant technological advantage to this project. Steve Vandiver explained that Rule # 8 deals with the "sustainability" portion of the Rules and Regulations, and this was based on getting the system back into the range of 1978 levels of pumping.

Due to current lack of data, this project is a "big deal" for the Conejos and Alamosa/LaJara systems, as it provides a critical piece of information. The team is coming together now, with the State doing some engineering, Allen Davey and Kelly Thompson involved as well.

Discussion: Charlie asked about the existence of reliable stratigraphic information, the possibility of electronic logging, the relative effectiveness of photographic data. Travis commented that timing issues are important, given the CWCB funding schedule, and the project needs to start soon. Nathan explained that the \$75,000 from RGWCD would be sufficient to get started. He acknowledged Charlie's comments, saying the project needs to make sure their data is good.

VOTE: The proposal for funding was duly voted upon and unanimously approved.

- ✓ Update - Rio Grande Watershed Emergency Action Coordination Team (RWEACT) -- Tom Spezze Executive Director reported on the monitoring of rainfall and drainages. "We're hopefully dodging the bullet on the burn scar." They're getting Doppler radar in place, working with University of Oklahoma Weather Radar Research Center which is releasing a prototype radar system with a much perfected system for measuring severe weather. They're working with Jerry Dennis in upper Rio Grande County. The Lobo site now provides the best coverage for weather radar in the upper Rio Grande. With Doppler and stream gauges in place, data is now available on the WREACT web site. Working with the University of Oklahoma, Steve Belz and other experts all in one room talking to the public about these systems. Tom said Heather's struggle represents a huge loss to the project. "She's had a huge positive impact, and Emma has been a great help. We're trying to keep Heather informed without burdening her.

This week CWCB will be meeting with Colorado Fish and Wildlife Commission re: the Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout. Currently waiting for the recommendation of the USFWS under a species review process, which is on hold right now. Tom stated that if the commitments hold and standing behind the conservation team, listing might be avoided.

- ✓ Update on Sub-District # 1 Issues – Steve Vandiver – Manager, Rio Grande Water Conservation District. Administration of the Subdistrict is running well, mostly due to the forbearance commitments – under which agreements are made to pay dollars instead of water on days when they are in priority. This reduces usage. There were only ten days in which they had to release water to the river. The rest the time was taken care of through forbearance agreements. Now they are making a daily release to the river, releasing a minimum amount of water, and that's good because it extends the water for the future. Depletions on many of the subdistricts are small enough that getting dollars seems more acceptable than getting a little bit of water. Continue to work with Craig Cotten on this. September 1<sup>st</sup> is the cutoff for getting meter readings, and they will be getting the tax notices out soon.

Steve met with WRRC last week gave them a briefing. They brief them at least twice a year and they are generally interested.

On September 30 the Supreme Court will hear the final 2012 court case in the case of the objectors about augmentation plans within the subdistrict. David Robbins is attorney for the proponents and Steve Atencio represents the objectors.

Good news: Alluvial Subdistrict # 2 is starting their petition process moving forward and Subdistrict # 6 will do so within a month. They will have their draft documents done soon, and Subdistricts # 3 and # 4 are in similar states, with their draft documents. All are committed to their petition process and dealing with the Rules when they come. The Saguache group's efforts have stopped due to the effort not having consensus of the well owners on how to move forward. The overall effort is very good with groups working very hard to gather up support. They are still waiting for data from the State engineer and hopefully they will get it before submission to the court. Modelers still have a few issues they're dealing with.

- ✓ Mike: Maybe at a future RT meeting you could show us how a Subdistrict is formed, as many might like to know the process. Other subdistricts are very different from #1 so each will have different concepts as to how they're set up.
- ✓ River Flows and Compact Status – Craig Cotten, Colorado Division of Water Resources  
Craig's 10 day report is available. They are coming to the end of irrigation season and they have some numbers to meet. There's still a 22% curtailment on the Rio Grande, downgraded from 605 down to 620. On Thursday CDWR had a 100% curtailment on the Conejos. Conejos got caught bad this year. Mike G. asked Nathan about the snow forecasting project for this winter and to "tell people what you're doing and who the players are." Erin Minks says it is unlikely there will be any more money for the radar project. Travis: "We need to find some partners – maybe aviators – we need to show the ongoing initiatives to Joe Busto, NASA, NWS; he's bringing other people in, many interested in what we're trying to do. We need to complement ourselves for the initiatives we have already underway."
- ✓ Future Meetings – Topics / Locations / Site Visits

Another possible future agenda item might be federal water rights. Rio suggested we all need to stop and have some fun. Come to the RiGHT Sunday Gilmore Ranch Celebration. Rio has tickets.

Adjourn

**Light Refreshments Will Be Served**

**Next Meeting: October 14, 2014  
Conference Room, San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District  
623 Fourth Street, Alamosa, Alamosa, Colorado**