

IBCC Colorado River Basin

1. September 25, 2017 CBRT Minutes.

1. **September 25, 2017 CBRT Minutes** – Meeting held at Reeder Creek Ranch near Kremmling with Windy Gap site visit and Colorado River improvements managed by the ILVK group site visit. Heard seven requests for Colorado Water Plan Grant support letters.
2. **Next Meeting: Nov. 20, 2017, Grand Valley, 12:00 – 4:00**, coupled with a tour of the Grand Valley Water Users Association work assisted by WSRF grants.
3. Upcoming Meetings
 - a. Oct 23, Next Steps; Colorado River District Offices, noon to 2 p.m.
4. Reporter: These minutes were prepared by Ken Ransford, Esq., CPA, 970-927-1200, ken@ransford@comcast.net.
5. **CBRT Members Present:** Art Bowles, Paul Bruchez, Stan Cazier, Carlyle Currier, Mark Fuller, Russ George, Bruce Hutchins, Diane Johnson, Merritt Linke, Ed Moyer, Ken Neubecker, Jim Pokrandt, Ken Ransford, Rachel Richards, Karn Stiegelmeier, Richard Vangytenbeek, Mike Wageck, Layne Wyatt
6. **Guests:** Peggy Bailey TetraTech, Richard Doucette Middle Park Water Conservation District, Brent Gardner-Smith, Hannah Holm CMU, Zane Kessler Colorado River District, Victor Lee BuRec, Heather Lewin Roaring Fork Conservancy, Brendon Langenuizen SGM, Holly Loff Eagle River Watershed Council, Laura Nichols Colorado River District, Don Meyer Colorado River District, Laurie Rink Middle Colorado Watershed Council, Derek Stoudt RUH Consultants, Bill Thompson ILVK
7. **River Forecast.** The Colorado River at Dotsero is flowing 1,950 cfs, higher than the median flow of 1,230 cfs on this date. The Colorado River is flowing 3,260 cfs at Cameo, higher than the median flow of 2,090 cfs on this date.
8. Eagle River Watershed Council, Holly Loff, Executive Director. Their mission is advocating for the health of the upper Colorado River and the Eagle River. They will be making a grant request to create an Integrated Water Management Plan, in an amount to be determined, at the November RT meeting. Also applying for a CWP grant, The watershed plan will:
 - a. Evaluate the recreation and environmental flow needs from Tennessee Pass to confluence with Colorado River at Dotsero.
 - b. Address the impact of the **Eagle River MOU, which plans to divert 10,000 af to each of Aurora and Colorado Springs and another 10,000 af for the West Slope.** The Colorado Basin Roundtable has never discussed the Eagle River

MOU in detail. Much of the Integrated Water Management Plan will focus on this. Colorado Springs and Aurora are willing to help contribute to this.

- c. **Six focus groups have been formed:** local government, agriculture, transmountain diverters, raft guides, West Slope water managers, and conservation including the BLM and Colorado Water Plan. Lotic Hydrological is the consultant.
 - d. The nonprofit **River Network**, which received a grant from the CWCB to help develop Integrated Water Management Plans, **selected the Eagle River Watershed Council** as one of the four groups they will work with. The River Network will serve as facilitator and **bring the six focus groups together** to determine whether they agree on the scope of work. They hope to begin this process in early 2018.
 - e. **Jim Pokrandt said this focuses on our main BIP themes.** He said the CBRT would send a letter of support
 - f. **Rachel Richards said the 24-month timeline is long, and that new water deals could be completed by then.** Holly said she spoke with Eagle River MOU participants, and they **don't expect** that any decision will be made within 2 years.
9. Laurie Rink, Middle Colorado River Watershed Council
- a. Like the Eagle River Watershed Council, **the Middle Colorado River Watershed Council will also make a CWP grant request for** an Integrated Water Management Plan; the grant request is still undetermined.
 - b. **The area covered** by the Middle Colorado River Watershed Council runs for **75 miles from the top of Glenwood Canyon to De Beque, including all tributaries** except the Roaring Fork River since it has its own Integrated Water Management Plan. It covers **2,000 square miles**. The Integrated Water Management Plan will be done in phases, since the area is so large. The first phase will focus on the mainstem, and develop a hydrological model of flows, including flows under future scenarios addressing additional diversions under the Moffatt and Windy Gap firming projects and climate change.
 - c. All the **tributaries are managed discretely, and many have lost their connection with the mainstem**. Glenwood Springs, Newcastle, Silt, Rifle, Parachute, and De Beque are all trying to **diversify their economies beyond natural resource extraction**, and recreation is rising to the fore. Eventually, all tributaries will be brought into the picture.
 - d. The first phase will be spent interviewing and involving stakeholders. They'll try to identify key tributaries, recreational facilities and future plans for recreation.

- e. Much of this area is water-short; the proposed Kendig Reservoir and other reservoir enlargements will affect this.
 - f. **Stan Cazier** commented that we are talking about basinwide planning — how does what’s going on in the upper counties affect what is happening in the lower communities? He **recommended that the upper counties be involved more.**
 - g. **Rachel Richards** commented that a lot of nonprofits have been looking at recreation flows for many years. She recommended that this should be coordinated and centralized, and **recommended that the Colorado River District create a recreation department** to gather this work in one place, and make it part of the Colorado River District’s job description and focus.
 - h. Laurie Rink commented that we do want to **tie these Integrated Water Management Plans together**, and the Colorado River District could be a good central place to do this coordination.
10. Lane Wyatt. **NWCOG QQ proposal.** NWCOG pushed for better water efficiency measures through land use planning—utilizing local government authority to make water use more efficient. They are rushing a **\$25,000 grant application** for the October 3 deadline titled, “**Water Saving Measures in Land Use Codes in the Headwater Region.**” They’ll ask the **CBRT for a \$5,000 match.**
- a. The grant will be tailored to **resort areas in the headwater counties**, and address **water efficiency in land use planning**, affect that population density has on water demands, and **provide technical assistance for up to 5 communities** in the region.
 - b. Encourage a high level of basin wide conservation, and develop local land and water planning codes.
11. The **Roaring Fork Conservancy** will ask for a Colorado Water Plan **grant for education and outreach**, and would like a letter of support. They have integrated themes of Colorado’s Water Plan and the CBRT BIP into their education programs.
12. Hannah Holm, CMU Water Center has done K-12 education and outreach programs through the math and science center previously. Sarah Johnson, who used to work for the Roaring Fork Conservancy, wants to develop a program to educate K-12 which is not well-addressed outside the RF Valley.
- a. They will propose to collect this information at the CMU Water Center, and do some teacher training, and give scholarships for students to attend a “hydrology camp” at the CMU Water Center. They anticipate the **grant request will be about \$25,000.**

13. Jim Pokrandt said that WateReuse Colorado will request **a CWP Grant support letter to create a working group to study regulatory impediments to reuse.**
14. Ken Neubecker said that **Carbondale, the Aspen Valley Land Trust, the Roaring Fork Conservancy and other stakeholders will request funds to rebuild the Weaver ditch** diversion structure near the fish hatchery on the Crystal River. They plan to make it more efficient and permanent so the Town of Carbondale does not have to go into the river and periodically rebuild the diversion dam. It will be part of a larger project to **improve the ditch from the headgate to the outfall.** They'd also like to create an education area so **students can come in and study riparian habitat.**
15. **Website update:** Ken Neubecker reported the website is up and running and needs content. Ken Ransford recommended that the **roundtable meeting minutes and basin implementation plan** be accessible from the website, and the **early versions of the basin implementation plan be included** since they contain a lot of information about basin IPPs (identified projects and processes, the potential diversions and water projects) that the final basin implementation plan did not include.
16. Brendon Langenheizen discussed an upcoming grant request by the Hay Meadow subdivision. They want to keep growing hay, and will be requesting funding to improve their ditches, currently in disarray. **Two of the 25 ditches in the Eagle County Conservation District survey that the CBRT funded in 2015 will be requesting a grant** to put in a new diversion structure that is more environmentally friendly. It would also **benefit a new subdivision** that has been approved, but not yet built. The initial phase is **110 units, duplexes and townhomes.** It would help Eagle maintain its minimum instream flow in Brush creek. The project is coordinated with the Town of Eagle and Eagle County; they own 2 of the ditches impacted by this. It has not yet been designed. The subdivision will be asking for both a Water Supply Reserve Account (WSRA) grant and a Colorado Water Plan grant.
17. **Tamarisk Coalition is seeking a letter of support for Colorado Water Plan funding to train 120 more people to eradicate tamarisk, and to treat 2,500 acres in Mesa County.** They're requesting \$76,000 in Colorado Water Plan funding, and will match it with \$85,000. They are only looking for a letter of support.
18. Stan Cazier motioned that we **authorize Jim to write letters of recommendation** for all the projects we have discussed; Karn Stiegelmeier seconded, and it **passed unanimously.**
19. Paul Bruchez showed a **video of the ILVK river improvements,** which the roundtable visited later in the day. ILVK refers to the **Irrigating Landowners in the Vicinity of Kremmling,** a group first referenced by U.S. Senate Document 80 that authorized the Colorado-Big Thompson project in 1937. The roundtable, which has funded this work with several grants, then toured the improvements.

- a. Irrigators are having difficulty getting water to their fields for several reasons. First, approximately **73% of the annual flow of the Colorado and Fraser Rivers are now diverted to the Front Range**; high runoff flows used to flood ranches between Granby and Kremmling since they were in the floodplain. With the proposed **Moffat and Windy Gap firming projects**, the annual amount diverted **will increase to 80%**. These numbers are approximate, since river flows vary so much every year.
 - b. Several years ago, **a rancher cut off a meander** by digging a new course for the river. All of the drop in the meander was concentrated into the shortened section. That created a **headcut that worked its way upstream through the soft sand** and silt river bottom. As the headcut migrated upstream, it lowered the riverbed below the **ditch diversion structures above Kremmling** so they **no longer worked**. The irrigation **pumps started sucking up sand and silt** instead of water, which **destroyed** them. Northern Water has spent millions trying to fix this problem to no avail.
 - c. The river improvements involve **digging a trench up to 12' deep in an upside-down V shape** across the river (that is, with the point of the V upstream) at select locations, and **filling the trench with 18" boulders**. Then, river cobbles were placed on top of the boulders. The structure was built up **high enough to raise the river level to its historic level**. It has survived the recent high runoff flows without damage.
 - d. Paul Bruchez pointed out that the **river banks above the restored structures had filled in with vegetation**, while the banks below were still eroding and barren. This streamside vegetation was restored **in only 12-18 months** once the river level was raised.
 - e. Paul Bruchez said that they would **ideally do this at 20 locations** in the upper Colorado River but that they **only had funding for about 12**. The 2 locations that the roundtable visited cost \$80,000 and \$120,000 to repair.
20. **Windy Gap Firing Project.** The roundtable visited Windy Gap Reservoir, which is an on-channel reservoir that completely captured the Colorado River just below its confluence with the Fraser River below Granby. The **reservoir was completed in 1985**. It effectively **captures peak hydrograph flows in the Fraser River** that Denver Water was not diverting so Northern Water could divert them to the Front Range.
- a. The reservoir has **disrupted the river's ecosystem**. Bud Isaacs, who owns 5.5 miles of Colorado River frontage below Windy Gap Reservoir together with an investor group primarily as a private fishing ranch, said the river ecosystem completely changed **after the reservoir captured the river in 1985**. There **used to be 24" rainbow trout, and sculpins** were common in the river. Today,

sculpins are only found above the reservoir. The **river bottom is armored** below the reservoir.

- b. Northern Water engineer Jeff Drager described the river improvements. The reservoir size would be decreased by about a third by building a retaining wall on its south side. This would **allow the Colorado River to flow around the reservoir** in a new channel on its south side, restoring river connectivity and turning the reservoir into an off-channel reservoir.
 - c. **Grand County provided Northern Water with a 1041 permit** so its Windy Gap Firing Project can go ahead. It has recently received approval for a 90,000-acre-foot **Chimney Hollow Reservoir** near Carter Lake (near Loveland) on the Front Range to firm up Windy Gap water rights. The army corps of engineers issued a **404 permit on May 18, 2017**, approving the reservoir.¹
 - d. Richard Doucette, a retired judge and Hot Sulphur Springs resident, asked if river temperatures would be cool enough. He said that water has spilled over the top of the reservoir, and it was too hot and harmed fish life below. About 100 cfs will flow down the newly dug channel south of the reservoir, but **10-15 cfs will still flow through the reservoir** to keep its water from getting stale. This water will be warmer, and Doucette feared that it could **cause damagingly high river temperatures below the reservoir**.
 - e. **Future high flows are expected to be 600 cfs, and 1,200 cfs every third year.** These are a fraction of the former **high flows**, which **exceeded 12,000 cfs 8 years out of 14 between 1905 and 1918** (Beebe, Bledsoe, Hardie, Colorado River in Eagle County Inventory and Assessment, Table 3.5, page 67, 2014, Colorado State University).
21. The roundtable then visited a **Colorado State Wildlife Area near Parshall**. John Ewart, a fish biologist of Colorado Parks and Wildlife, explained river improvements. He said they plan to **re-engineer the river** channel by building point bars that divert the river into more concentrated areas so it will **have deeper channels**.

¹ “Windy Gap: \$400M Chimney Hollow Reservoir Wins Federal Approval,” May 18, 2017, AP, <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/windy-gap-400m-chimney-hollow-reservoir-wins-federal-approval>.