

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

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday Jan 8, 2019
San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District
623 Fourth Street,
Alamosa, CO 81101

Chairman Nathan Coombs called the meeting to order at 2:03pm.

Those present/signed in: Ron Brink, Judy Lopez, Emma Reesor, Leah Weaver, Eugene Jacquez, Robert Getz, Stan Moyer, Travis Smith, Ann Bunting, Maryanne Talbott, Nathan Coombs, Keith Holland, Bethany Howell, Ronda Lobato, Cleave Simpson, Daniel Boyes, Heather Dutton, Virginia Christensen, Adam Moore, Dwight Martin, Peter Clark, Hannah Thill, Larry Sveum, Mark Smith, Mike Gibson, Chuck Finnegan, May Engquist, Max Ciaglo, Heather Greenway, Wayne Schwab, JoAnn Slivka, Alex Fulk, Allen Law, Erin Minks, Ruth Heide, Gene Farish, Dani Gronhøvd, Mario Curto, Charles Spielman, Nicole Langley, Ryan Unterreigier, Brenda Anderson, Greg Higel, Cary Atoia, Christi Bode, Rick Basagoitia, Joelle Marie, and David Marquez.

Rio de la Vista and Cindy Medina had excused absences. Travis Smith held Cindy Medina's proxy.

Approve Agenda

Dwight Martin motioned to approve the agenda as printed. Dave Marquez seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

Approve December 11, 2018 Minutes

The emailed minutes were corrected via email by Heather Dutton, but Wayne Schwab's excused absence was not included. The minutes also did not reflect Eugene Jacquez's attendance at the meeting. Nicole Langley motioned to approve the minutes with these changes, and Judy Lopez seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Public Comment

Chairman Coombs opened the floor for public comment. Judy Lopez began by reminding all members to email her headshots for the Roundtable website member bios, else she will take candid ones at the February meeting. Judy also introduced Bethany Howell as the new PEPO representative and education point person for the roundtable, beginning January 1, 2019.

Christi Bode put in a plug for an upcoming film festival, "Mountain Film on Tour," which will be held the evening of January 24 at the Vali 3 Theater in Monte Vista. The festival is comprised of a collection of pieces about adventure, the environment, and social justice issues, and is a local community fundraiser that will support the Vali 3 Theater, the Del Norte Trials Organization, and the Rattlers mountain biking team.

Emma noted that the Rio Grande Water Leaders course is coming up in March, and invited people to spread the word. The course is one week long and held in the evenings, and dives into water issues and hydrology in the Valley.

Judy informed the group of two other upcoming events, a grantee meeting for the San Luis Valley Conservation Connection Initiative, which will be held January 17th from 10am-3pm in the Rio Grande Water Conservation District office, and the Congreso of Acequias on January 26th, which will be held at the San Luis high school.

Reorganization of Roundtable Leadership

Heather Dutton opened the floor for nominations for the positions of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary, noting that the Roundtable could choose to keep the current officers or elect new ones. Mike Gibson nominated Nathan Coombs to retain his position as Chair, and Travis Smith seconded the nomination. <NAME> motioned to close the floor to further nominations and vote on Nathan's nomination; Travis seconded the motion and Nathan was unanimously re-elected as Chairman of the Roundtable.

Travis nominated Emma Reesor to retain her position as Vice Chair, and David Marquez seconded the nomination. Dwight Martin motioned to cease the nominations and vote on Emma's nomination; Ronda seconded the motion and Emma was unanimously re-elected as Vice Chair.

Cleave Simpson nominated Judy Lopez to succeed Cindy Medina as Secretary, and Travis seconded the nomination. Dwight motioned to end the nominations and vote on Judy's nomination, and Peter Clark seconded the motion. Judy was unanimously voted in as Secretary.

Nathan thanked everyone for putting their time and effort into the Roundtable, noting that the water situation has changed greatly over the last 14 years due largely to the Roundtable's efforts. He called for members to keep the Roundtable as a priority in order to face upcoming challenges to our best ability. Travis reemphasized the importance of the Roundtable's role in creating messaging for the Valley and acting as a forum to discuss issues and build relationships. Both men thanked Mike Gibson for his work on the Roundtable.

IBCC Update and Hydraulic Conditions - Cleave Simpson

Cleave began by reminding everyone that he and Keith Holland are the Rio Grande Basin representatives to the Interbasin Compact Committee, which was formed in part to discuss transbasin diversions. Although the Colorado Water Plan's frameworks for transbasin diversions were written with the Front Range in mind, those frameworks will still apply to the Rio Grande Basin and we should be aware of them. The IBCC's next meeting is February 28.

Based on the drought monitoring data from NOAA, the Rio Grande Basin has been in the extreme drought zone for fourteen consecutive months. However, the last three months have improved slightly, as regions of the Sangre de Cristo mountains have decreased from exceptional drought to extreme drought. The SNOTEL forecast has also improved, increasing from the mid-60% to 76% of average snowpack, although we are still in one of lowest brackets, a distinction shared with the southwest corner of the state. Cleave also noted that 76% of normal snowpack is still much better than last year.

Cleave reiterated that 2018 was the fourth worst flow on the Rio Grande in recorded history, with a decade of not hitting annual flows of 700,000 AF and two decades of not hitting 800,000 AF, which is unprecedented.

Subdistrict 1 is responsible for replacing 700,000 AF, the change in the level of the aquifer since 1976, to the unconfined aquifer north of the Rio Grande. The drought resulted in a loss of 230,000 AF in storage last year. Since pumping has been relatively constant since 2013, that drop is not a result of increased pumping. This drop in the aquifer level comes after several years of increases in aquifer storage due to conservation efforts in the Valley.

Cleave received a letter from Kevin Rein, the state engineer, which was published in the paper. The letter stated that if the Rio Grande Basin can't get the aquifer storage back up, the engineer's office will have to impose restrictions on well pumping. The curtailment of well diversions could even occur before the end of the 20-year period, if it becomes clear that the goal can't be met in time. The authority to do this is based on the subdistricts' annual replacement plans (ARPs), which outline the subdistricts' operations for the year and are approved annually by the state engineer. Subdistricts 2 and 3 will submit their first ARPs this year, by April 15.

Colorado Open Lands – Sarah Parmar

Sarah Parmar, Director of Conservation at Colorado Open Lands, spoke to the Roundtable about working to create more flexibility, regarding associated water rights within the framework of their conservation easements. Traditionally, conservation easements prevent water rights from being sold, leased, or used in ways that help meet other landscape needs. Currently, conservation easements lack flexibility and creativity, so Colorado Open Lands is looking for ways to keep the existing incentives of conservation easements but work with the community to adapt them to new situations.

The example of a flexible conservation easement Sarah described was part of a project funded in part by the South Platte Basin Roundtable. The South Platte has significant pressure to transfer water rights from agricultural to municipal use, but the current practice is "buy and dry," which gives security to the municipalities but removes all control from the original owner. Colorado Open Lands is looking to create a 3rd option, other than a conservation easement and outright selling, that would couple the certainty and long-term protections of a conservation easement with the supplemental income of leasing a water right to a municipality. This particular project sought to conserve a farm just south of a property bought by Castle Rock for potential water development. This is the first time NRCS has approved this more flexible language.

In the context of the San Luis Valley, where pressure for municipal use is low, flexible conservation easements would more likely be in the form of ag to ag leasing or involve curtailment and instream flow programs; the exact form of the easement would be developed on a case by case basis. The point is to reevaluate what options we can offer farmers in the face of current aquifer levels and low water years.

Judy ended the presentation by encouraging the Roundtable to think about what this would look like in our Valley, and if it would be enough of an incentive to deter people from selling their water to out of the Valley users.

Division of Water Resources Update – Pat McDermott

The following numbers for 2018 have not yet been finalized by DWR. On the Rio Grande, the annual flow was 282,000 AF, 44% of the long-term average. For comparison, in 2017, the flow was 108% of average. The compact obligation was 71,400 AF, or 25% of the index, whereas in 2017 it was 29%. The forecasted credit to the compact for this year is 3,000 AF.

On the Conejos, the annual flow was 160,000 AF, 52% of average, with a 25,000 AF compact obligation or 16% of the index. In 2017, it was 143% of average with 53% of the index owed to the compact. The forecasted credit on the Conejos is 1,000 AF.

The hydrographs show that year after year water is being delivered earlier; while we used to get major flows in July, the main flows are now being delivered in April, before the irrigation season. We need sustained flows. In 2017, junior water rights came into priority. When this happens, the water is spread around more, which is better for the aquifer. Pat presented the hydrographs for the Rio Grande, Conejos and Alamosa Rivers, and Trinchera Creek.

The SNOTEL forecast for our region is below 75% of the median but is still up from the 31% of last year. Forecasted precipitation is above average for January, February, and March, increases even more for March, April, and May, and lingers into May, June, and July. The precipitation is expected to move in from the southwest. The forecasted temperature is expected to be only a little warmer than normal in January, February, and March.

There have been a couple personnel changes at the DWR. James Heath took a position with the Division 5 Engineer's office in Glenwood, and Jim Swanson retired. The Compact meeting will be held in Alamosa in early April.

Colorado Water Conservation Board Update – Megan Holcomb

The next CWCB meeting is January 28 and 29, immediately preceding the Colorado Water Congress on January 30 – February 1.

In 2017, the CWCB staff recommended putting \$75 million towards the implementation of the Colorado Water Plan over 3-5 years. In FY2017-2018, \$25 million was set aside for grants, but was reduced to \$11 million in FY2018-2019 because of a reduction in severance funds. The staff recommended budgeting \$20 million for FY2019-2020 to make up for this, followed by \$19 million in FY2020-2021 to reach a total of \$75 million as proposed. The amounts for the different CWP grant categories are recommended to stay consistent with last year. An additional \$5.5 million is recommended for water plan updating efforts to ensure SWSI outputs can be incorporated into the Basin Implementation Plans and that there will be financial support for the basins to update those plans. The \$5.5 million will also include funding to create tools for data visualization and communication.

The next deadline for the CWP grant cycle is February 1, with final approval in April. The Water Supply Reserve Fund balance for the Rio Grande Basin is \$101,052. \$1 million was replenished January first, divided up as \$40,000 for each basin account and \$640,000 for the state account. Currently, the only application from the Rio Grande Basin up for review is the Mosca Hooper grant, requesting around \$43,000.

There is an implementation working group tasked with giving feedback on the SWSI communication products during their development, with the goal of getting stakeholder input from the beginning of the project. There is more information about this working group under the implementation tab at Colorado.gov/cowaterplan, and there will be live recordings of each meeting. The calls are the fourth Thursday every month, starting January 30. Roundtable members are invited to join.

Chairman Coombs adjourned the meeting at 4:05 pm.

The next Executive Committee meeting will be February 12, 2019 at 1:00pm

Next Roundtable Meeting: February 12, 2019 at 2:00pm
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