

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

**MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday March 12, 2019 at 2:00pm  
San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District  
623 Fourth Street,  
Alamosa, CO 81101

Chairman Nathan Coombs brought the meeting to order at 1:58 PM.

Those in attendance/signed in: Judy Lopez, Ron Brink, Cindy Medina, Daniel Boyes, Karla Shriver, Kate Ryan, Chuck Finnegan, Chris Shaffer, Jenny Nehring, Kyle Hagerty, Cary Aloia, Stan Moyer, Nathan Coombs, Robert Getz, Wayne Schwab, Cleave Simpson, Nikita Christensen, Tony Aloia, James Henderson, Cathy Morin, Rio de la Vista, Emily Chavez, Ronda Lobato, Mario Curto, Virginia Christensen, Larry Sveum, Eugene Jacquez, Nicole Langley, Angie Welch, Diane Kielty, Casey Davenhill, Gene Farish, Matthew Gallegos, Hannah Thill, Charles Spielman, Adam Moore, Heather Dutton, Emma Reesor, Megan Holcomb, Erin Minks, Ron Thompson, Max Ciaglo, Ryan Unterreiner, Sharon Vaughn, Brenda Felmlee, Doug Larson, Benton Line, and Leah Weaver.

Brenda Anderson, Dave Marquez, Ann Bunting, Peter Clark, Bethany Howell, Mike Gibson, and Keith Holland had excused absences. Cleave Simpson held the proxy for Keith Holland.

**Approve Agenda**

Agenda item seven, "Colorado Water Trust Request for Water, Kate Ryan," had been added since the original agenda was mailed out. Nicole Langley motioned to approve the agenda as amended, and Ron Brink seconded. The agenda was approved unanimously.

**Approve February 12, 2019 Minutes**

Cleave motioned to approve the February minutes as printed, and Mario Curto seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

**Public Comment:** *Please limit your comments to 3 minutes.*

Rio de la Vista thanked people for coming, helping, and sponsoring the State of the Basin Symposium. Over 300 people attended. The symposium was videotaped and will be uploaded to the ASU YouTube channel soon.

Emma Reesor announced the completion of the Rio Grande Water Leaders Course at the beginning of March. There were about 30 applicants and 24 participants, which shows continued interest and need for the course. Participants consisted of a range of community members and people involved in the water community already and the course works to encourage people to get involved even more. The course organizers are considering putting on a more advanced course in the future.

Sharon Vaughn, the project leader for the USFWS wildlife refuges, announced the success of the 36<sup>th</sup> annual crane festival and encouraged the group to come out to the refuges and see the cranes. She also thanked Jenny Nehring, head of the crane festival committee for Friends of the Refuges, for their hard work and support.

#### **Wetland Dynamics Assessment Project Report - Cary Aloia**

Jenny Nehring and Cary Aloia reported back on the SLV Watershed and Wildlife Conservation Assessment, funded nearly two years ago. This assessment documented wet acre resources in the valley and gave recommendations for conservation of these historic wetlands. Partners on the project included federal and state agencies, as well as Trout Unlimited and other nonprofit groups. The project was funded for \$39,000 with a total budget of \$228,000.

The assessment included a GIS analysis of wet acres from 1984-2017, creation of habitat matrices and San Luis Valley-specific fact sheets for 35 identified priority species, a summary of public lands and conservation efforts in the valley, a draft scorecard for habitat analysis, and recommendations for future work. The assessment concluded that wet acres in the valley have declined dramatically since the 1980s, with the majority of wet acres existing on private lands. The early spring and fall are the most limiting times of year for wildlife resources, while wet meadow, grassland, riparian, and mudflat/playa habitat types are the most affected and show the largest reduction in acres, consequently limiting habitat types. The study also found that 42% of Colorado's wet acres are in the San Luis Valley, the most out of any region.

The final report is currently in draft form and awaiting input from federal partners, but is expected to be finalized by the end of April.

#### **Colorado Watershed Assembly - Casey Davenport**

The CWA is a nonprofit with a statewide presence, created in 2002 to create neutral conversation opportunities in the water world. The group is also involved in the Metro and South Platte Roundtables, providing outreach and public education support. Angie Welch, the board president, thanked the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District for their support of CWA's annual conference, Sustaining Colorado Watersheds, in October. She also brought the Colorado Healthy Rivers Fund (CHRF) to the group's attention. CHRF is funded by donated tax refunds and is administered jointly between the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Colorado Water Quality Control Division. The Fund gives flexible funding, and recently awarded a grant to the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project for riparian stabilization. The 2019-2020 application period will open soon.

#### **Colorado Water Trust Request for Water – Kate Ryan**

Kate Ryan is a staff attorney for the Colorado Water Trust, a statewide nonprofit that works to restore flows to Colorado's rivers through flexible and voluntary transactions with water users. The organization was founded in 2001 to partner with the Colorado Instream Flow Program. The Trust works within the prior appropriation system, creating unique solutions to benefit the environment while compensating users at a fair market value. So far, 28 projects across the state have been completed successfully, with 10 more in the works, adding nearly 32,500 AF back into rivers across the state.

The process begins with a Request for Water, when water users can submit a confidential, commitment-free preliminary offer. These offers are reviewed for free to gauge fit. The Trust looks for direct flow surface water rights with a good history of flow that are more than 0.5 cfs of flow or 20 AF of storage. After initial review, the Trust and CWCB work with the water right owner to complete the official approval, come to an agreement that works for all parties, and negotiate compensation. Agreements can include temporary loans or leases, long-term leases, permanent acquisition, water conservation programs, and more. More information can be found on their website at [coloradowatertrust.org](http://coloradowatertrust.org).

**Funding Request: Rio Grande Stream Management Plan Aquatic Habitat Data Collection** - *Daniel Boyes, Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project*

The Colorado Water Plan directs Stream Management Plans (SMPs) to identify flows and other physical conditions and incorporate environmental and recreational values, among other things. The Rio Grande Basin SMPs already include a series of assessments: instream infrastructure, riparian vegetation, water quality, aquatic life, hydrology and geomorphology, and recreational uses. However, the SMP team realized the Plans are missing a quantification of aquatic habitat needs, so this request is to cover those costs. The assessment will use a variation of the R2-Cross protocol used by CWCB for instream flows. The R2-Cross will give detailed information on channel geometry including stream cross sections and pebble counts and will be combined with stream morphology and existing flows data. Fisheries experts will then be consulted to get flow recommendations and habitat availability along the study reaches. The addition of this assessment will improve understanding of aquatic habitat on the Rio Grande, Conejos River, and Saguache Creek, and will be helpful to agencies across the valley. This assessment will also inform other assessments and the Plans in general, providing a basis for prioritizing projects. The project supports the goals of the Colorado Water Plan and Basin Implementation Plan (BIP), particularly BIP goal 11. The request is for \$28,000. However, in order to complete the assessment before spring runoff, other previously granted CWCB funds had to be moved around, since the requested funds wouldn't be available until June. This request will now fund the created deficits instead of directly funding the aquatic habitat assessment, with \$8,000 going to stakeholder engagement, \$8,000 to developing goals, and \$12,000 to report writing.

Megan Holcomb, CWCB representative, also informed the Roundtable that a new website, through the River Network, will go live soon. The site includes FAQs and other information about the SMPs.

Judy Lopez motioned to approve the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project's request for \$28,000 in funding. Rio de la Vista seconded the motion, which was approved unanimously.

**Hortau: Soil Moisture Measurement** - *Doug Larson*

Hortau is a soil moisture management company based in California that sells a proprietary soil tension sensor, which measures how easy or difficult it is to pull water from the soil. The sensor can be accessed through telemetry for real time data management. The company also provides agronomic and field support for farmers using their technology. The goal of the technology is to help manage stress events that can cause accumulated yield loss by giving insight into what's happening before plants show stress. As a crop pulls more and more water, the soil tension increases, allowing the

farmer to adjust accordingly. The sensor sees multiple depths, with 1-2 probes tied into one device. Data is updated to the cloud every 15 minutes and can be coordinated with drip irrigation events. A similar concept for center pivots is in development now, as well as new technology for real time flow meter and well management. Doug Larson is a sales representative for Hortau and can be contacted at 970-481-0655 and [dlarson@hortau.com](mailto:dlarson@hortau.com).

#### **IBCC Update - Cleave Simpson**

The Interbasin Compact Committee met in February and renewed their commitment to the Colorado Water Plan (CWP). Their new director, Russ George, and five new gubernatorial appointees wanted to formally reaffirm the IBCC's commitment to the plan and spearheaded the effort. There was some discussion about funding for the CWP, but the group didn't come up with clear or specific direction. At that meeting Cleave presented the Renewable Water Resources proposal to export water from the San Luis Valley. He felt that there was good engagement from the IBCC with an informative discussion and ideas for next steps followed the presentation. The CWP outlines the IBCC's role in interbasin transfers in its conceptual framework, and the IBCC wants to be involved.

During the Roundtable Executive Committee meeting, the group talked about how the Roundtable should structure communication and confront the Renewable Water Resources proposal. They want to create a vision and framework about how conversations regarding water transfers should occur, and create a message telling the story of this basin and its value to share with the Front Range Roundtables. James Henderson, Rio de la Vista, Judy Lopez, Christi Bode, Daniel Boyes, Heather Dutton, Charlie Spielman, Virginia Christensen, Emily Chavez, and Cary Aloia volunteered to be involved with this effort.

#### **Sub-district Update - Cleave Simpson, RGWCD**

Cleave said that there is not much new to report. The District will be submitting annual replacement plans for three subdistricts by April 15. All six subdistricts are formed, but the other three are only looking to submit their plans of water management.

#### **Division of Water Resources Update - Craig Cotton**

The 10-Day analysis of stream flow forecasts and predicted curtailment was sent out the day of the Roundtable meeting. The DWR gets its forecasts from the National Resources Conservation Service, the National Weather Service, and a couple other sources. Craig chose the highest predicted values, because he believes we'll have higher runoff. The Rio Grande was at 117% of average snowpack, with 760,000 AF forecasted flows. This would mean 225,000 AF owed to downstream states, 160,000 AF of that during the irrigation season, resulting in 23% curtailment. The Conejos is at 112% of average snowpack, with 335,000 AF forecasted flows. This would mean 127,000 AF owed, 107,000 AF during the irrigation season, and 34% curtailment. The current snowpack for the Rio Grande Basin as of March 12, 2019 was 138%. Cotton warned that some water will be lost to riparian areas and the ground because of the need to rewet those soil profiles due to since last year's dry conditions. The irrigation season had not started yet anywhere in the valley but will probably start April 1.

Craig also reminded the Roundtable that the Basin is hosting the Rio Grande Compact meeting on April 4 at the Rio Grande Water Conservation District office at 9am. The meeting is public, and there will be a reception at the Vista's restaurant at ASU on April 3 as well.

**Colorado Water Conservation Board update - Megan Holcomb**

Megan announced that a one-page fact sheet about SWSI has been created to give Roundtables talking points that are consistent across the state. The balance in the statewide account was \$1.6 million, with just over \$1 million in asks for the March meeting. The Rio Grande basin account balance was \$47,000 before approval of the RGHRP's funding request.

There are openings for the Colorado Water Loss Initiative, starting in April. This is a program CWCB is hosting as a partner to train suppliers on water loss recovery best practices. There was also new guidance for conservation approved at the January CWCB meeting, which provides step-by-step instructions for water providers to collaborate with land use authorities on development.

The March CWCB Meeting will be held next week. At the March meeting, the CWCB board will consider approval for the 2019 Work Plan for drought contingency planning – it was item #28 on the agenda. The board has also dedicated \$20 million for Colorado Water Plan updating, which is separate funding from the BIP and SWSI update money. The Bureau of Reclamation will also be announcing a funding opportunity for water quality standard projects in June. Since January, CWCB has also added several new board members: Gail Schwartz, Jessica Brody, and Jaclyn Brown.

Before ending the meeting, Chairman Coombs reminded the group that there will be no April Roundtable meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 4:26 pm.

The next  
Executive Committee meeting will be May 14, 2019 at 1:00pm

Next Roundtable Meeting: May 14, 2019 at 2:00pm  
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