

NPBRT Meeting Minutes: 6-2-21

Members/Liaisons present

*Jimmer Baller
*Randy Miller
*Bryce Russell
*Barbara Vasquez
*Ty Wattenberg (Chair)
David Graf (CPW)
Aleigh Aurin (CSU Extension)
Curran Trick (Liaison to CWCB)

Non-RT members present

Rebecca Mitchell (Director, CWCB)
Russ Sands (CWCB)
Dr. Telck (Water Equity Taskforce)
Erin Light (Div. 6 Engineer)
Matt Reddy (DU)
Kara Sobieski (Wilson Water Group)

Members/Liaisons participating remotely)

Tara Wertz (USFWS)

Non-RT members participating remotely

Amy Honholz (Div. 1 Water Comm, Dist 48 & 76)
Sam Stein (CWCB)
Robert Sakata (Governor Appointee: IBCC)
Ed Millard
Juan Madrid (CDPHE-drought study)
Matt Linburg (Brown & Caldwell)

Members/Liaisons not present

*Coby Corkle
*Pat VanValkenberg
*Blaine Evans
*Mark Hackleman
*Carl Trick
*Kari VanValkenberg
*Rick Wyatt
*Jim Dustin
*Wade Allnutt
*Mike Allnutt
Paula Belcher (BLM)
Christopher Old (USFS)

(*NPBRT voting members)

This meeting was held in a multimodal approach with 14 people attending physically and 7 attending remotely via zoom. Thanks to Sam Stein & for Aleigh Aurin for the support for remote participation.

1-Agenda Review

Agenda accepted as distributed.

2) Review/Approval of draft minutes for May 2021 meeting.

Jimmer Baller made a motion to approve the draft minutes as submitted & Randy seconded the motion. Approved unanimously by members present.

3) Update on CWCB

Director Rebecca Mitchell

Becky updated us verbally on three topics:

-Demand Management

The Board has taken steps to further evaluation demand management and to set direction. Step2 Demand Mgt is not a program but an exploration of a potential tool and/or program for discussion. So much has happened over the past year and a half including intensifying drought, so CWCB proceeded, knowing they couldn't lose time in spite of the pandemic. CWCB recognizes webinars don't work for everyone, but the virtual platform has provided a way to

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include more folks in the dialogue. Amy Ostik is managing the project. You can see an update on EngageCWCB.org.

-CO River

Becky reminded us that she is also serving as Colorado's Commissioner for the CO River for both the Upper CO Commission and the entire Commission (including lower states).

Upper States: WY, UT, CO, NM

Lower states: CA, AZ, NV

She's working hard to include broad input and coordinate with other upper states so they can stand together in negotiations with lower states. Negotiations haven't started yet but the outlook for the river is very worrying. The approach is to engage in long range planning now so we don't have to react in an emergency without direction. An upper state like Colorado has no reservoirs above us to draw from in drought emergencies, so we take shortages when nature doesn't deliver. As an example, she pointed out Ed Millard is in an area of the state being impacted seriously with much lower water availability than normal. The Colorado Drought Contingency Plan was signed a couple years ago, containing optional, voluntary responses to drought. It was crafted in conjunction with other upper states.

David Graf asked how she is dealing with the short term triage in advance of the 2026 renegotiations. Becky replied that the current hydrology is really complicating negotiations. All are feeling shortages but those who are most vocal get the attention. In order to protect ourselves, we need to document what happens to CO in shortages including impacts to ranching, farming, water-based recreation, environment and M&I. We need to message as a community what shortages mean to us, then figure out how we pull together to do the best we can.

Juan Madrid asked how the 500,000AF storage is dealt with in DM. CO is allocated 51.75% of the 500,000AF storage out of the 4 upper basin states, but there's no guarantee how that translates into wet water.

BIP

Becky emphasized that the CO Water Plan 'nothing' without the BIPs. It's where you (the basin) have the most impact. She considers the Colorado Water Plan equivalent to the 'body', but the BIPs are the "heart". No basin has a common vision of the future. The BIP is the unique expression of the local water stakeholders. We recognize that the 'lift' for the RTs to create BIP is bigger for the North Platte because of the small # volunteers involved due in large part to the small population in the basin.

Stream Management Plans (SMPs)

(Note: See David Graf's extensive comments about the SMPs that he has participated in with other Basins in the Addendum at the end of these minutes. Thanks to David who was kind enough to provide the text to ensure the info was correctly reported)

Becky explained that SMPs go beyond watershed plan or restoration plans. They look at resources holistically and came from Water Plan. Other basins are either considering and/or implementing them in their basins. Other people can explain the benefits to you.

Recommendation: Preserve your options to use this approach. SMPS are locally driven. No regulations have come out of them and they may become a program with associated funding. Rio Grande has used them extensively and seen benefits. But again, there are no statutory requirements, no legislation. It gives stakeholders in a basin the opportunity to come together as community to evaluate resources. There are benefits that can come from a science-based

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evaluation of rivers, streams, their behavior and changes over time. And they can identify projects that can benefit multiple stakeholders including ag, water-based recreation, environment. I don't want to see this basin preclude the future opportunity to use this tool in the future.

Curran asked about funding. Becky replied that SM plans can leverage other sources of funding. She pointed to the Rio Grande SMP which has leveraged almost \$10M for projects.

Russ S... It's important that SMPs are done well so they point to important infrastructure that needs funding.

Barbara V- How was the Rio Grande SMP funded and what entities (beyond the RT) executed it?

Becky M- It would be good to talk to RG or CO basin to learn from their experiences- the challenges, failures, successes.

David G.-

(See David's extensive comments, which are very helpful, in the addendum at the end of these minutes.)

I have been involved in a lot of the SMPs in various basins including the Yampa/White/Green and Colorado. He explained that every SMP is different, different sizes, different means of implementation and focus. Integration into BIP is often captured within the E/R component. It's clear that we can't address E/R issues without engaging Agriculture. For the Middle Colorado, recreation and fisheries issues assessed at the intersection with agricultural diversions. Great structure (headgates, ditches) assessments. Integrated effort and came out with ~50 consumptive and nonconsumptive projects that will be wrapped into project plans for BIP. Yampa doing a very intensive SMP, integrating recreation, riparian and ecological resources in conjunction with Ag and structures. Nothing is predetermined...it's what is developed locally.

Becky M.- We have to be ready when we have opportunities- when funding becomes available. Stimulus funding if available will be spend on water projects that are shovel ready.

Russ S.- You can access the info at <https://www.coloradosmp.org>. The SMPs represent a robust community effort based on community's values/priorities.

Jimmer B.- Quorum but small one tonight. Prefer to have a presentation at larger meeting from an entity that's done an SMP.

Becky M.- I think we have to consider the timing. Agree that more information is important but a decision is needed soon on whether to preserve the option for establishing a NP SMP in the future.

Kara S.- I have been involved in RG and other basins. We have an opportunity to discuss/answer questions that this basin might have.

Curran T.- My questions include who funded the work of the SMP, what problems arose that needed to be addressed, what outside resources were needed to do the stud?

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Kara S. -There's big range of costs which depended on the extent of SMP and goals. SMP execution involves Ag, hydrology, recreation, fish biologist or riparian ecosystems,

Curran T.- Who has taken the lead...Conservancy Districts, RTs, ? We don't have people who have paid salaries to organize this, so it will fall on the RT. Who can we reach out to in order to initiate a SMP?

Becky M.- It doesn't have to start now and you don't have to do it alone. Hire someone to do the scientific work with RT guiding (not doing) to work. I am hoping that with additional information from other basins who have used SMPs that NPBRT will be able to see some benefit. Curran, you may be have some connections with folks from other basins who could inform this RT.

Russ S.- SMPs are one more tool in the tool box and it's important to keep it as an option. We don't need a decision to do SMP or not...just include as an option in the BIP.

Ty W.- Our first BIP has some inclusions that we didn't use to start with but used later. So I have no concern about putting an earmark in the plan .

Kara S.- Vol 1 document draft needs to be done in next month. I can distribute a copy to NPBRT in Aug and the RT will have till end of Nov to finalize.

Ty W.- I don't have a problem with preserving the tool. Asked for a straw poll of members present. Jimmer B.- No problem leaving it open as an option. Just didn't want to make a decision to do an SMP for the whole RT. Bryce R.-ditto. Randy M.-I agree with Jimmer. See advantages to be a decision-making tool. Predominantly-based Ag community. A lot of riparian corridors have been degraded that need restoration. Tourism is becoming increasingly important in the basin so we need to focus on recreation & environment. Barbara V.- Agree on the need to address recreation and environmental issues in an integrated plan. Drought-driven shortages may create increasing the urgency of doing so

Curran T. – I will work to find folks from other basins to speak to experiences with SMPs. She asked Becky to explain Forestry funding. Anything for fire mitigation?

Becky M.- I testified for bill to get funding for fire recovery last week. Around \$20-30M. But wants to get update from legislation & will send out info by email.

Barbara V.- I had the opportunity yesterday to participate in an overflight of the Mullen Fire scar with 2 employees of the USFS. They have concerns not only about debris flow into riparian corridors but also invasive species. They told me they had received permission to spray the scar for invasives (cheat grass) even in wilderness.

Ty W suggested possible next steps for the BIP update work. Either:

- 1) Review mock-up in July
- 2) Receive final draft in Aug for review. Kara could come up in Sept or Oct to review and take comments.
- 3) Leave it for the consultants to finalize

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4) Old Business/New Business

None

5) Next meeting

Next meeting set for **Tuesday July 6** from 7-9pm in the basement of the SCD building. The agenda will include presentations by representatives by one or more basins who will share their experiences with SMPs. We will also finalize the elements of the draft BIP that will preserve the option for the NPBRT to initiate a SMP in the future, should they choose, but we will not be making a decision about a NP SMP at this meeting. We look forward to the majority of RT members to attend the meeting in person. However, virtual option will be provided to allow the broadest participation.

6) Meeting adjourned

Addendum: David Graf's comments on SMPs

- Yampa / Steamboat Spring Stream Management Plan - completed about 12 miles of river health assessments using COSHAF (CO Stream Health Assessment Framework), which resulted in some project direction specific to riparian reforestation and specific sites where the City of Steamboat could affect change in a positive way on their lands. DG served as technical advisor on flow, riparian, fishery components and as liaison to CPW property managers (Chuck Lewis SWA was upstream few miles of project area). Funded in part by BRT, City of Steamboat and other partners; Kelly Romero-Heaney main contact for project. COMPLETED.
- Yampa IWMP - Integrated Water Management Plan specifically done through Yampa-White-Grn BRT - acquired and leveraged a LOT of funds >\$600,000 to break off structure assessments from ecological assessments for Upper Yampa (Yampa and Bear River mainstems above Stagecoach); Middle Yampa (Stagecoach to Elk R confluence... or maybe Elkhead Ck); Lower Yampa (... to Dinosaur NP) and the Elk River as a separate priority stream. Significant ecological assessments driving future projects and Yampa Scorecard Project (assessing current vs future conditions... YSP is now establishing criteria for scoring and how to implement); identifying areas of impairment. Structure assessments ~45 were accomplished in 2019 (pilots for methodology clarity) and 40+ in 2020 resulted in a 'structure score' relative to fully functional. Assessment criteria included by functional criteria (ie, does the diversion work? Measuring device? fish screen? means of diversion?...) as well as information about ecological conditions at the structure. Yampa IWMP includes contracted staff hired specifically for outreach and coordination for different reaches being studied; active engagement from multiple, diverse interests along the Yampa R. Nicole Seltzer (River Network) main contact. ONGOING...
- White River IWMP - similar in principle to the Yampa River IWMP in that both riparian conditions and 'structures' will be assessed for functionality, utility, and for ecological conditions in the reach or at the structure being assessed. This

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seems to be a streamlined version of the Yampa IWMP, with a much reduced budget, but one that also includes contracted staff hired specifically for outreach and coordination of a complicated implementation process. Driven by Planning Advisory Committee and State Conservation Districts (Callie Hendrickson - Douglas Ck and White River CDs). ONGOING

- Eagle River Community Water Plan - IWMP based on future implementation of the Eagle River MOU, a document / outcome from development of the original Homestake Reservoir Project, that contemplates future development of Eagle River waters for both west and east slope benefits. The Eagle River CWP is determining stakeholder priorities and objectives, both w.r. to 'health of the river' and a growing recreational economy, but also for future municipal/ industrial users and maintenance of agriculture in the valley. Homestake Partners (Aurora, CO Springs Utilities, Climax mine...) are active in this process; Samuel Wallace at Peak Facilitation or Holly Loff (ED at Eagle River Watershed Council) are main points of contact for this process. Includes 'dueling models' w/ Homestake Partners and Eagle River W&S, and a lot of detail on recreational uses along the corridor (Gore Ck + Upper and Main Eagle to Dotsero).
- Middle Co Watershed Council - completion of their IWMP complemented a watershed assessment (~ 6-8 yrs ago), and a watershed plan, and also consisted of a split process between non-consumptive and consumptive components. Consumptive assessments were completed under contract w/ NRCS, State CDs (Bookcliff, Southside, Sopris), and Co River Engineering (Wendy Ryan); Non-consumptive efforts completed through MidCo Watershed Council and contractor Lotic Hydrologic (Lotic also has worked on City of Steamboat SMP, Eagle River CWP, San Miguel SMP, ... maybe others... they are very active). Result was well vetted and collated project list (~55 projects) that can be appended to the CO Basin BIP for that sub-watershed / unit of planning as per the CO BRT BIP guidance. Included non-consumptive and consumptive projects, and an array of structure vs plan- or policy-oriented projects.

Also participated in a 'framework' project done for the entire CO Basin, that resulted in a web-link to an CMU project that continues to update information and research by reach/ sub-watershed/ river node in a GIS housed at CMU. Haven't re-visited this much since inception (~2018) but can provide a great data housing for information coming from both SMPs/ CWPs/ IWMPs, and from larger BRT processes at work in the CO Basin. Other SMPs I'm aware of but haven't participated in in the NW Region are on the Crystal River, the Blue River, Upper CO (Learning by Doing). Roaring Fork has the Roaring Fork Conservancy which actively engages its citizens in projects, education, and community river stewardship. They have a watershed plan, but I don't think they've drilled down to 'Stream Management Planning' as described in the 2015 Co Water Plan.

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There's so much more to these processes than I can describe here. An key message is that these are all different, and there is no formula for how to get these done, or what the best strategy is, but you won't know what's working unless you try something!