



Inter Basin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables  
Rio Grande Basin Roundtable

Tuesday, November 09, 2021, at 2:00 pm

In Person

8805 Independence Way

Alamosa, CO 81101

*Zoom Virtual Option*

**Meeting Minutes**

**Call to Order**

Chairman Nathan Coombs called the meeting to order at 2:04 pm.

**Attendance**

Those in attendance in person and online included Nathan Coombs (Conejos Water Conservancy District), Anna Greenberg (Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, NRCS), Charlie Spielman (Industrial/Domestic member at large), Ronda Lobato (Costilla County Conservancy District), Bethany Howell (CO Department of Agriculture), Hannah Thill (Rio Grande Water Conservation & Education Initiative), Jeff Derry (Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies), Emma Reesor (Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project), Daniel Boyes (RGHRP), Sally Weir (Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust), Charlie Goodson (Colorado Open Lands), Matt Hildner (San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District), Michael Carson (Rio Grande Water Conservation District, City of Alamosa), Keith Holland (Agriculture and Reservoirs Member at Large), Nikita Christensen (Rio Grande County Representative), Jim Ehrlich (Alamosa County Representative, Colorado Potato Administrative Committee), Chuck Finnegan (Conejos County Representative), Amber Pacheco (RGWCD), Christi Skeie (Moxie Cran Media), Virginia Christensen (Alamosa-La Jara Conservancy District), Dale Pizel (Wildlife representative), David Chelf, Dwight Martin (Alamosa-La Jara Conservancy District), Judy Jolly (Agriculture Member at Large), Wayne Schwab (Trinchera Water Conservancy District), Connor Born (RGHRP), Darin Schepp (Colorado Division of Water Resources), Daryl Kohut (Rio Grande National Forest), Travis Smith (Reservoirs Member at Large, National Wild Turkey Federation), Representative Donald Valdez, Cary Aloia (Wetland Dynamics), Robert Sakata (Sakata Farms, CWCB Board Member), Erin McWilliams (RGHRP), Judy Lopez (Conservation Easements member at large, Interim Vice Chair), Karla Shriver (Legislative Appointee), Adam Moore (CO State Forest Service), Erin Minks (Senator Michael Bennet's office), Elizabeth Schoder (Colorado Water Conservation Board), Sam Stein (CWCB), Craig Cotton (Colorado DWR), Alex Puglisi (National Wildlife Federation), Martha Williams (Rio Grande National Forest), Jake Kunugi, Antonio Huerta (Senator Hickenlooper's office), Chris Shaffer (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Dominic Nava, Kurt , Matt Stearns (CWCB), Priscilla Wagoner , Sue Swift-Miller (Bureau of Land Management), Greg Peterson (Colorado Ag Water Alliance), Heather Greenwolf (Headwaters Alliance), Judy Lopez and Jared Romero (Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership).

Rio de la Vista, Mike Gibson, and Karla Shriver were excused.

*Note: The Chairman explained that given the large number of virtual attendees, the Roundtable may vote by two methods: 1) using basic voting procedures (first and second motions and unanimous consent), and 2) using Common Consent, by which the Chairman makes a motion and, barring a dissenting vote, the motion passes.*

### **Agenda**

Nathan made a motion to approve the agenda with the change of moving Matt Hildner WSRF project presentation to first slot, and the motion passed unanimously.

The chairman made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Minutes**

The Chairman asked for approval of the October minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously.

### **Public Comment**

- **Christi Skeie** – Christi has been working with CDPHE on nonpoint source pollution and presented a calendar developed by CDPHE that highlights best practices for water quality using examples from around the state. Christi distributed the calendar to the group. Emma noted that the project was included in the Basin Implementation Plan and requested a letter of support from the Roundtable.
- **Emma Reesor** – Emma requested a letter of support for Rio Grande restoration project on the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge downstream of the Chicago Ditch. The project would enhance riparian and aquatic habitat condition and would be funded through multiple grants.

Charlie made a motion to provide such a letter. Dale Pizel seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Karla Shriver abstained.

- **Daniel Boyes** – Daniel reminded the group that Volumes 1 and 2 of the draft Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) Update have been posted online for public comment through November 15. The documents can be accessed on [engagewcb.org](http://engagewcb.org).
- **Bethany Howell** – Bethany discussed multiple items related to grants and advisory committees at the Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA):
  - Two grants have recently been posted: 1) Specialty Crop Block (**deadline Nov 15**) to support the specialty crop industry and to facilitate producers affected by pandemic-related challenges and 2) Noxious Weeds (**deadline Dec 17**) – to support projects controlling Colorado’s designated noxious weeds.
  - The Farm-to-Market Processing and ACRE 3 Energy Efficiency grants are accepting applications on a rolling basis.
  - Advisory committee openings: The CDA is accepting applications for the following advisory committees:
    - Soil Health
    - Noxious Weeds

- CDA is hosting Climate Smart Ag workshops, which will take place weekly throughout November.
- Rulemaking hearings:
  - November 18 - Colorado Ag Future Loan Program
  - Nov 30 - Pesticide Applicator's Act, Public Livestock Markets Veterinary Inspection, and Hand Weeding and Hand Thinning

For more information or to recommend someone for one of the advisory committees, contact Bethany ([bethany.howell@state.co.us](mailto:bethany.howell@state.co.us)) or visit: <https://ag.colorado.gov/blog-post/cda-at-a-glance-november-2021>.

- **Representative Donald Valdez** – Representative Valdez mentioned that he is sponsoring two bills related to forest health that will provide funding resources for volunteer firefighters and financial assistance for landowners undertaking wildfire mitigation on private lands. Donald asked anyone with questions or anyone who would like draft copies of the bills to contact him.
- **Charlie Spielman** – Charlie recommended the book *Dark Winter* to members of the Roundtable. This book describes a future in which global cooling occurs.
- **Robert Sakata** – Robert reminded the group that the Colorado Agricultural Water Summit will take place December 9<sup>th</sup>. Robert also mentioned the anti-speculation bill.
- **Greg Peterson** – Greg expressed thanks to sponsors of the CO Ag Water summit and highlighted the fact that the cost of agricultural producers' attendance has been covered by these sponsors.
- **Chairman Nathan Coombs** - Nathan noted that the Rio Grande WSRF Basin Account has nearly \$400,000 and the state account balance is ~\$8 million. He also described changes to Roundtable funding in the coming years. After this year, the severance tax will no longer be used to fund the Roundtable. Each Roundtable's Basin Account will receive \$300,000 annually for the next three years. Nathan expressed the importance of the Roundtable process and noted that the state and CWCB staff recognize the importance of the Roundtable process and are working to secure future funding.
  - Nathan also provided a segway to Bethany Howell regarding the timing of meetings. Bethany said she has spoken to several community members who would be interested in attending if the meeting was held later in the day (i.e., outside regular business hours). Bethany described multiple options for including more people and perspectives including holding alternating every other meeting in the evening. Charlie noted that he has not heard of anyone who cannot attend because of the timing. Nathan responded to Charlie by saying before his role with the Conejos Water Conservancy District, he had trouble attending daytime meetings. Emma Reesor suggested a Roundtable survey to gather opinions on meeting times could be helpful.
  - Erin Minks noted that several years ago, the Roundtable met at Adams State University in the evening (5-8pm) and a challenge was providing food during the meeting. Judy Lopez expressed her support for daytime meetings and said she felt the current meeting time provides an opportunity for a lot of people (agency Folks) to attend. Travis Smith

said he is also interested in gaining more attendance and remembers holding meetings in different locations and at different times during the day. He suggested continuing the conversation in the Executive Committee or as a subcommittee of the Roundtable.

- A morning meeting was suggested, Nathan noted that the San Luis Valley Wetland FAC meeting is typically held during the morning from 9 to 12 noon. Cary also noted that daytime meetings are preferable to her as well. Martha Williamson noted that the zoom option provides additional options for attendees and perhaps evening meetings would be more feasible with the zoom option. Jim Ehrlich said he agrees, and he feels that zoom also gives people the option to attend during the day. Sam Stein noted that the South Platte currently holds their Roundtable meetings on the second Tuesday of every month and that we should consider that if we decide to switch our meeting time.
- Matt Hildner handed out paper copies of the Roundtable Education Committee's Augmentation 101 fact sheet. Nathan described the intention of the monthly 101 sheets. Nathan noted that although projects that weren't included in the BIP Update can still be considered, the Roundtable will need to evaluate each project that comes before the Roundtable very closely. Nathan also noted that the education committee would like ideas from the Roundtable for other monthly topics. Nathan said all the 101 sheets will be posted on the Roundtable website so they can be accessed in the future.

The group took a break from 2:40 to 2:45

### **Final Project Presentations**

#### ***Shaw Reservoir Rehabilitation Project – Matt Hildner***

Matt presented on the Shaw Reservoir Rehabilitation Project. The project is comprised of four primary components:

1. Engineering
2. Rehabilitation of the outlet works
3. Headgate and feeder ditch replacement for the reservoir
4. Automated measurement and reservoir controls

This pre-compact reservoir would allow the release of water higher up in the basin and allow for more flexibility in reservoir releases for well augmentation. The diversion for the reservoir comes from Kitty Creek and is located in the West Fork Complex burn zone. The project will repair damage that was done during the wildfire. The new headgate will act as a fish barrier to allow for improved water diversion and upstream native Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout reintroduction. The new pipeline would be about 500 ft long and would transport water from Kitty Creek to the reservoir. The current outlet works is stable but may need repairs in the near future. This Project will address potential issues by performing preventative maintenance and will leverage project funds by replacing the outlet works while construction crews are already mobilized. Fix the measurement flume: The Project would include the installation of a new flume and riprap below the outlet. The new headgate would include a trash rack. Installation of automation for water measurement at the diversion point and for reservoir operations (at the main headgate). Matt described the timeline and budget. The total ask is \$412,000. Budget details are in the SLVWCD's full application. Matt noted the ways in which this project aligns with the BIP. Specifically, this would allow for the reintroduction of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout and would secure a permanent augmentation pool from Shaw Reservoir. Sue Swift-Miller also noted that this would provide

augmentation water for wells at the Blanca Wetlands. The Project would also contribute to the local economy through recreation. Additionally, SLV communities will benefit from the new augmentation opportunities this reservoir will provide. This will also provide increased flexibility in terms of water administration.

Charlie noted that after reading through the application, he didn't see how the project activities and project benefits justified the funding request. Nathan noted that engineering costs, for example, are quite high for reservoir projects. Erin Minks noted that the road washout has been approved. Charlie also asked why BLM is involved. Matt explained that BLM has purchased a transmountain diversion and Shaw Reservoir allows BLM to store that water, which will allow them to augment wells. Sue Swift-Miller also noted that Colorado Parks and Wildlife is also a project partner and will be involved in and benefit from this project. Bethany noted that the project will address potential issues and Nathan noted the value of pre-compact reservoirs.

Judy Lopez made a motion to fund the multi-benefit project in full. Craig Cotton also voiced his support of the project, particularly the water rights administration flexibility it will afford for Basin water users. Kevin Terry seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Karla Shriver abstained. Charlie Spielman opposed the motion due to its high cost versus the project's benefits.

#### ***Jeff Derry - Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies (CSAS)***

Jeff provided an overview of the Dust-on-Snow Project, which is a long-term project that samples snowpack to forecast snowmelt rates and magnitude. CSAS also collaborates with agencies and researchers on a variety of other types of research projects. Jeff explained that this data is important because it documents dust layers within the snowpack and not just the surface layer, which is provided by aerial surveys. This on-the-ground, site level data complements aerial snowpack data. Dust can have a profound impact on the rate and timing of spring snowmelt due to changes in albedo. Jeff noted the hydrologic impacts dust-on-snow events have on streamflow timing and amounts. Specifically, runoff can peak earlier. Jeff highlighted work with the USGS, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and other organizations that dovetail well with Dust-on-Snow data. For example, the BOR can more optimally manage reservoir releases to maximize flows for multiple uses. Jeff noted the significant benefits this work has for stakeholders in the San Juan and Rio Grande Basin watersheds due to the Senator Beck station's proximity to these basins. The request is \$15,000 from each basin roundtable account and \$120,000 from the statewide account, totaling \$240,000. Match funding comes from project partners.

Charlie asked why the request did not include all Roundtables. Jeff explained that the request was denied at the North Platte roundtable.

Michael Carson asked Jeff to explain more about microplastics. Jeff explained that microplastics are those plastic-derived particles that are quite small and are being deposited regionally. This project will investigate the potential sources of microplastics.

Jim Ehrlich asked if project costs are lower during low snow years. Jeff explained that regardless of the snow year, project work is significant. Jim Ehrlich made a motion to approve the project. Charlie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### ***Conejos River Partnership Project – Emma Reesor***

This project involves irrigation infrastructure improvements along the lower Conejos River. Sites have been identified with the Conejos Stream Management Plan (SMP), and initial phases are underway, including the North Eastern, New JB Romero, Sabine, Fuerticitos, and Elledges ditches. This project is underway thanks in part to initial funding from the Roundtable last year. Emma showed a river condition map developed in the SMP and noted that the CRPP was prioritized in the SMP. Emma explained that additional needs were identified at CRPP sites, including headgate automation. Additionally, actual project costs are higher than initial cost estimates due to COVID-related supply chain issues. Funding for CRPP Phase 1b will support design and engineering, replacement of diversion and headgate structures, headgate automation, and riparian and aquatic habitat enhancements. The project includes several partners, including state and federal agencies and private landowners. Emma showed a map of the project area, which is the Conejos River from Mogote to the confluence with the Rion Grande. Emma noted that in addition to being supported by the Conejos River SMP, the project aligns with Basin Implementation Plan goals by supporting healthy watersheds, vibrant communities, and water administration.

Emma provided an overview of the budget. Total project cost is \$660,000, with a request from the Roundtable basin account of \$33,000 and \$297,000 from the statewide account. Emma noted that matching funds from the Colorado Department of Agriculture Drought Contingency grant is pending and the total request will be less if that funding is not secured. Additional budget details are in Emma's full application.

Jim Ehrlich asked why the Colorado Housing Finance Authority is involved as a funder. Emma explained that CHAFA supports local agricultural and recreational economies, and this project supports both of these interests.

Judy made a motion to approve the WSRF request. Virginia seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **Master Irrigator Course - Amber Pacheco**

Amber provided an overview of the master irrigator course. There is a \$100 registration fee, but once you complete the course you are paid a stipend of \$2,000 over the project duration in exchange for reporting data and participation. For information, visit the Rio Grande Water Conservation District website or contact Marisa Fricke ([marisa@rgwcd.org](mailto:marisa@rgwcd.org)).

### **Subdistrict Update – Amber Pacheco**

Subdistricts are continuing to find water sources to replace depletions, including ATMs and cooperative agreements. Subdistrict 1 is working on an amended Plan of Water Management to reach aquifer sustainability goal. Subdistrict 4 is working on a groundwater easement project. Subdistrict 5 was not successful in getting an annual replacement plan approved by the state and will be exploring well options to better make replacements closer to Saguache Creek. Wells in the subdistrict were shut down for a period of the summer. However, progress is being made to secure augmentation water in Subdistrict 5. The Subdistrict 5 board recently approved groundwater allocation rules and are working on an augmentation well which would help supply augmentation water. Kevin asked where the well is located. Amber said it is located northwest of the sawmill. Jim Ehrlich asked about whether the augmentation well will be sufficient to meet augmentation requirements. Amber explained that

between the newly drilled well and well injury payments, there may be sufficient water to replace depletions.

#### **DWR Update – Craig Cotten**

Craig Cotten gave an update on the Rio Grande Compact. As noted in the ten-day report, deliveries are quite close to actual delivery obligations under the Compact. Craig also gave an update on the Compact litigation, which involves a lawsuit filed by the State of Texas against New Mexico. The Special Master had the special witnesses go first this fall and expert witnesses will go in the spring. Compact litigation began on Oct. 4 with Colorado as a bystander.

Irrigation season ended October 31 and the Conejos ended 10 days early this year. This is the first year with the 2015 Groundwater Rules and Regs in effect. Overall, Craig said it has gone well this year, although there is still some work to be done to reach full compliance by all water users in the Basin.

Nathan asked the Roundtable whether they would like to hold a lunchtime meeting for the December Roundtable meeting. With no comments, Nathan suggested holding a lunch meeting.

Nathan also mentioned the need for a Roundtable Secretary and asked those with CWCB what kind of funding is provided to pay for that position. Elizabeth Schoder said she believes it is \$5,000 annually. If any Roundtable members are interested in the secretary position, email Nathan.

#### **CWCB Update – Elizabeth Schoder**

Elizabeth noted that it is the last week for public comments the draft BIP Update on [engagewcb.org](http://engagewcb.org). Elizabeth also said they have launched the projects database, which includes all projects from the BIP Update. The hope is that updating the database will not be as heavy a lift now that it has been created. Additionally, CWCB released a statewide water survey to gather information regarding Coloradans' sentiments towards water resources in the state. Phase 2 Colorado Water Loss Initiative – free water loss training through CWCB. More information can be found at [coloradowaterloss.org](http://coloradowaterloss.org). Small water systems are encouraged to participate. The next CWCB board meeting is Nov 17 and 18.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:50 pm.

The next Roundtable meeting will take place Tuesday, January 11<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 pm.