

## Inter Basin Compact Committee Basin Roundtable

### Rio Grande Basin Roundtable

#### Meeting minutes

Tuesday August 9, 2022

#### **Call To Order**

President Nathan Coombs called the meeting to order at 2:06 p.m.

Those in attendance were Nathan Coombs (CWCD, Roundtable Chair), Travis Smith (Reservoirs), Erin McWilliams (RGHRP), Judy Lopez (Trinchera), Heather Dutton (CWCB/SLVWCD), Wayne Schwab (Trinchera), Kevin Terry (Trout Unlimited, Recreation), Rio de la Vista, Ronda Lobato (CCCD), Judy Jolly (Ag Member At-Large), Connor Born (RGHRP), Charles Spielman (M&I Water Users), Hannah Thill (RGWCEI), Keith Holland (Ag/Water User At-Large), Michael Carson (RGWCD), Adam Moore (CSFS), Andy Brown (RiGHT), Lori Laske, Cassandra McCuen (RGWCD), Anna Greenberg (Bird Conservancy, NRCS), Joel Nystrom (COL), Sally Weir (RiGHT), Erin Minks (Sen. Bennet), Jock Jacober (SdCAA), Cary Aloia (Wetland Dynamics, LLC), Sue Swift-Miller (BLM), Vern Heersink (Alamosa County), Amber Pacheco (RGWCD), Jordan Trujillo (Trinchera), Nina Jenson (Trinchera), Sierra Graeber (Trinchera), Carol Riggerbach, Karla Schriver, Craig Cotten (DWR), Robert Hurd, Chris Schaffer (USFWS), Jeff Rodriguez (CWCB), Cindy Medina, Daryl Kohut (USFS), Emma Reesor (Vice Roundtable Chair, RGHRP), Jared Romero, Jenny Nehring, Larry Sveum, Robert Sakata (CWCB), Reese Vanderpool, Thomas Hanson, Sam Stein (CWCB), Mike Gibson, Dale Pizel (Wildlife), Kat Weismiller (CWCB), Russ Sands (CWCB), Darin Schepp (DWR).

Members with excused absences: Virginia Christensen (Water User at Large), Nikita Cooper (Rio Grande County Representation/Roundtable Secretary).

Two additions to the agenda were made: item 5a to discuss House Bill HR5118 and item 3a for a reminder for the timeline for WSRA funding. With these amendments, the agenda was approved. The minutes from July 12, 2022 were approved.

#### **Public Comment**

Robert Sakata spoke about the Monte Vista soil health program happening this weekend. He commented on the NRCS soil health workshop takeaways.

Rio de la Vista announced water classes for Adams State start in late August. These classes, including Water 101 and a water equity class, are available for the community to audit. Registration information is available on the Adams State website.

Charlie Spielman encouraged water users in Rio Grande Basin to “fudge” ag numbers over a decade and divert more water into recharge ponds in the Subdistrict #1 area to bring the water table back up. To make up the water shortage, water would be pumped from the confined aquifer in closed basin. He met with Pat McDermott, who told him that a water case in 2004 declared the confined aquifer fully allocated. Moving forward, Charlie plans to work with owners of water rights to utilize the water for different purposes. He hopes that the RGBRT will back this plan moving forward.

Judy Lopez suggested skipping the RGBRT meeting in October if there will not be any funding requests for Water Plan grants. Typically, the CWCB funding timeline involves a project preview in October, review in November, and submitted to CWCB by December. WSRF funding only requires a support letter in November. She also mentioned that there will be tour of Rio Grande Basin, partnering with Water Education Colorado, in lieu of the September RGBRT meeting.

### **PEPO Update**

Judy Lopez gave the PEPO update, which included the RGBRT's tour of Trinchera Blanca Ranch last month and talked about the tour of the Culebra Basin happening tomorrow. The tour, in partnership with the Costilla County Conservancy District, will highlight COL's acequia conservation work and the upper Culebra Watershed Assessment, with 32 folks basin-wide signed up. Upcoming, there will be a tour of the Rio Grande Basin on September 13 in lieu of RT meeting; sign up information will be available in the near future.

There are three articles set to come out in the month of August. The 101 sheet focuses on the Habitat Conservation Program.

The education committee has not heard back about the status of the PEPO funds application. Judy encouraged folks to reach out if they have content ideas or things they'd like to see.

### **New Business**

Travis Smith gave an overview of bill HR5118, the "Wildfire Response and Drought Resiliency Act", which is a consolidation of 48 other bills involving wildfire pay, infrastructure updates, water rights for native tribes, and the formation a contingency plan to manage the western water situation, which was in-part informed by delegates of New Mexico. Built into this bill is the Rio Grande Water Security Act. The purpose of the Rio Grande Water Security act would create a working group to form a basin plan, including building resiliency of community, increasing monitoring and studies, and updating reservoir operations. Travis suggested that the language in the bill might introduce potential to change the Rio Grande compact. The working group described in the bill would be made up of federal organization leaders and doesn't mention inclusion of state leaders/water users in the group to represent local interests. This was further explained by Erin Minks, who reported that efforts to kill this bill were unsuccessful, and now are working to slow it down. She adds that the New Mexico offices did not contact the Colorado offices about this bill, and suggests reaching out and reestablishing those connections with New Mexico groups. With this bill on a fast track, Travis asked the Roundtable to consider opposing this portion of the bill to our congressional representatives. Karla Shriver made the motion for the Roundtable to oppose the legislation as it stands, and Travis Smith seconded the motion. With none opposed, the motion passed. Travis Smith and Erin Minks set to collaborate to draft the RGBRT letter of opposition.

Cassandra McCuen presented on the Habitat Conservation Program (HCP), which was formed as a community-based approach to conserve key species while allowing for covered activities to occur. She gave an overview to the program, discussing ideal habitat for these species, what covered activities are, why it is needed, its goals, and how it works. She invited interested parties to attend the upcoming steering committee meeting Monday, November 7 at 1:30 PM.

Adam Moore gave a presentation on the 2021 Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) forest health report, which is available on CSFS website. With persisting drought, CSFS is completing critical work and working around the state on forest health projects and community safety. The report identified that the dry, warm weather in 2021 put stress on the trees, making them more susceptible to insect attacks and wildfire, and emphasized the importance of watershed health and implementing projects that provide resiliency and protection for forests during these times.

Jeff Rodriguez, the new CWCB RT liaison, started the CWCB update by informing the RT that the Regional Coordinator application closes tonight at midnight. The public comment period for the Water Plan Update ends September 30, with scheduled working sessions to read through the different sections of the plan. Information on when and how to attend these working sessions can be found on the CWCB website. CWCB is also taking comments and questions for this draft document, which can be submitted through [engagecwcb.org](https://engagecwcb.org). Vivian Pinelli is the new RT coordinator; contact her 30 days in advance for events and/or food requests. The Grant loan payment portal is live. For portal questions, watch the video tutorials online or contact Ben Wade. CWCB is enhancing the virtual meeting technology of each Roundtable by funding OWL technology. \$17 million dollars have been made available for WSRF funding. These funds will be used to bring each Roundtable bank account to \$1 million, and can be used to provide statewide matching funds. WSRF funds need to be approved by RT October 1<sup>st</sup> need to be approved in the portal. Adding on to this update, Heather Dutton recapped the CWCB meeting, which included a presentation on statewide effort to fund the establishment of the Airborne Snow Observatory to better forecast streamflows and increase drought resiliency. She added that the increase in WSRF funding helps with aging infrastructure/ storage/reservoir projects that don't fit under Water Plan grant criteria, which improve storage for multi-benefit purposes.

Amber Pacheco gave an update on the Subdistricts. Subdistrict 1 submitted their Plan of Water Management to the State, where it will be reviewed by the RGWCD board for a hearing period of 30 days. If approved by the board, the plan will be adopted. The application period for the position of Subdistrict 1 program manager ended last Friday. The RGWCD is now in the process of reviewing applications.

Craig Cotten gave the DWR update. He reported that compact curtailment has gone up to 13% on the Rio Grande and 26% on the Conejos, due to the recent significant rainfall. The current Rio Grande Compact lawsuit is still undecided, and there decision to either move forward with mediation or move forward with a trial. If a resolution is not reached, the trial will be set for the end of September.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

The next:

Roundtable Meeting November 8, 2022 at 2:00 p.m.

Executive Committee: November 8, 2022 at 1:00 p.m.