

Inter Basin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables  
Rio Grande Basin Roundtable  
MEETING MINUTES  
Tuesday, January 10, 2022 at 2:00pm  
Rio Grande Water Conservation District  
Alamosa, Colorado

**Call to Order**

Nathan Coombs called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Members present: Nathan Coombs (CWCD/Roundtable President), Erin Minks (Senator Bennett), Rio de la Vista, Virginia Christensen (Water User at Large), Judy Jolly (Ag Water User), Connor Born (Rio Grande Restoration Project), Erin McWilliams (Rio Grande Restoration Project), Daniel Boyes (Rio Grande Restoration Project), Greg Higel (Rio Grande Water Users), Kevin Terry (Recreation), Keith Holland (Agriculture/Reservoirs), Wayne Schwab (Trinchera Water Conservancy District), Cathy Morin (RiGHT Board Member), Tim Lavota (Saguache County), Peter Clark (Water User), Judy Lopez (Conservation Easements), Alex Funk (TRCP), Patrick O'Neil (Mosca Hooper Conservation District), Bethany Howell (CDA), Emma Reesor (Rio Grande Restoration Project), Michael Carson (City of Alamosa), Adam Moore (CSU Forest Service), Christ Ivers (RGWCD), Darin Schepp (DWR), Donald Valdez, Ethan Franke, Jared Romero, Jim Ehrlich (Alamosa County/CPAC), Karla Shriver (Legislation Appointee), Michelle Lanzoni, Orla Bannan, Robert Sakata, Russ Sands (CWCB), Hannah Thill (RGWEI), Travis Smith (Reservoirs), Cindy Media (Alamosa River), Amber Pacheco (RGWCD), Payton Valentine (CWCD), Carol Rigenbach, Anna Greenburg (Bird Conservancy), Roselee Reese (RiGHT), Cary Aloia (Wetland Dynamics/Recreation), Theresa John-Dellaport (Quantum Water), Susan Storm (USBR), Kelsey King (Colorado Open Lands), Joel Nystrom (COL), Craig Cotton (CDWR), Fay Hartman (American Rivers), Mike Gibson (Member at Large) and Nikita Cooper (Rio Grande County Representative/Secretary).

The minutes from the November and December meetings were approved as presented.

**Public Comment**

Anna Greenburg, Bird Conservancy, reminded the group that the Annual Monte Vista Crane Festival will be March 10-13, 2023 and noted that an email was sent to the roundtable members with more details.

Rio de la Vista noted that the Growing Water Smart Workshop was able to award \$50,000 in grants to participants of that workshop.

Joel Nystrom announced that Sangre De Cristo Acacia Celebration will be held March 11, 2023.

Bethany Howell with the Colorado Department of Ag announced that CDA's Ag Workforce Development Program is now open.

Nominations for Chairman were opened. Mike Gibson nominated Nathan Coombs as Chairman. Keith Holland seconded the nomination. Nathan was elected as Chairman.

Judy Lopez nominated Heather Dutton as Vice Chair. Kevin Terry seconded the nomination. Heather was elected Vice Chair.

Judy Lopez nominated Nikita Cooper as Secretary and Recording Secretary. Cary Aloa seconded the nomination. Nikita was elected as Secretary and Recording Secretary.

Alex Funk, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, updated the group on Federal Funding opportunities. Alex noted that there are two new programs under the Infrastructure Funding that should be released in the next few months. The Rio Grande Basin is on the priority list for the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding. The Bureau of Land Management will also be receiving 5 million dollars through IRA. NRCS State offices will be defining eligibility for 20 billion to be used on climate smart and ag projects, that funding will mostly be funneled through existing programs. Another 5 billion will be pushed out through a new EPA program focused on Climate Risk Reduction.

Fay Hartman, American Rivers, asked the Roundtable members for a letter of support. American Rivers and TRCP are partnering to create a resource and networks within the San Luis Valley to connect projects to federal funding. The project goals include: 1. Identify and understand database projects within the categories of restoration and riparian, 2. Generate awareness about federal funding (create data base), 3. Help entities submit applications and agreements to federal partners, 4. Communicating project success. The letter of support was approved.

Sally Wier, Colorado Open Lands, gave an update on their Groundwater Conservation Easement Project. She gave an overview of the conservation easements being offered. Conservation easements are legally binding agreements that are voluntary, permanent, specifically tailored to a property, and ensure land ownership and access. These easements address land management, including soil erosion and weed management with a reduction of water pumping. The first Groundwater Conservation Easement in the nation was closed in November which included 19,000 acres (12 crop circles). The easement includes retiring 7 circles and reducing pumping by 50% on the remaining 5 circles. This will offer a water savings of 1,710 AF per year in subdistrict 4.

Andrea Telak, Culebra Watershed Partnership Project, requested funding. She noted that a wide range of assessments had been completed and projects have been identified. One of the projects that was identified was the need for a demonstration Watershed. Other issues identified were fire and water administration. She outlined the tasks that the project will contain including Task 1. Stream Gage installation and monitoring, 2. Demonstration Watershed Project (communication, forest health, irrigation efficiency, water management, debris flow risk, improve riparian corridor, and 3. Grant Administration. The request was for \$145,000 for WSRF funds, and matching funds of \$149,500. Travis Smith made the motion to fund the project. Cindy seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Saguache County Project Preview was presented by Tim Lovato and Theresa John Dellaport. Tim noted that Saguache County has tightened their 1041 regulations. Saguache County Commissioners have begun this water study and are allocated funds to match this project. The project includes the following tasks: Tasks 1. Install additional monitoring points (and pumping tests), 2. Install transducers in a total of 19 wells, 3. Based on additional data collected, review RGDSS model and provide recommendations, 4. Provide info to the public, 5. Report the findings which will identify areas where Saguache County can potentially use 1041 for additional requirements for approval of development within the County. Saguache County is putting up \$75,000 worth of funding. The project timeline would be one year. It was recommended that the Division Engineer and modelers be consulted and that their support be obtained for this project. It was noted that the distance between wells is 60-100 feet. Saguache County will own the data. They plan to work with the peer review team and work with the division engineer. It

was noted that this project may not fit into the WSRF funding as that focus has changed to aging infrastructure and drought resiliency. It was clarified that the Roundtable does not support one type of water user over another. It was recommended that the County take the modelers' recommendation on where they need additional data.

Judy Lopez gave a PEPO Update. She recognized Erin McWilliams for her work on the Education Committee. Judy invited everyone to come to the Education Committee meetings. She also noted that the PEPO position is now available. The committee is planning a snowshoe trip in February.

Craig Cotton updated the group. The Rio Grande Compact lawsuit may be looking at a settlement between the states, however the US is not part of that settlement. Craig noted that the Rio Grande's annual flow at Del Norte was 443,000-acre feet (68% of long term average) for 2022. Annual flow on the Conejos was 266,000-acre feet (89% of long term). SWAG, a group of well owners attempting to develop their own augmentation plan that will include 17,000 acres will go to trial in July. There is also a group on La Garita Creek that are trying to get new surface water rights. Craig also noted that the Division of Water Resources has open positions including a water commissioner in Saguache creek.

Heather Dutton, CWCB Updated the group: at the last CWCB meeting they learned that the Rio Grande LiDAR flights need to be flown again for snow off data, after that takes place this summer, snow on data can be collected. Subdistrict 3 and the Trinchera worked together to purchase a property in the Southern end of the San Luis Valley using a CWCB loan. The Water Plan is completed and will be available in Spanish and English. Heather recognized staff for all their hard work on the water plan revision. Heather introduced Laura Spann, CWCB's new regional water plan grant manager.

Jeff Rodriguez announced that the Water Plan Celebration will be held on January 24, 2023, downtown Denver which will include Basin Hero Awards. The Department of Local Affairs has published a funding guide that may help local entities find funding sources. Heather Dutton's term will be over in January, however the Rio Grande Basin has two good applicants including Nathan Coombs and Erin Minks. Travis moved to endorse Erin and Nathan for the CWCB Board. Judy seconded the motion and the motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.