

Inter Basin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables
Rio Grande Basin Roundtable
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday August 8th at 2:00pm
Rio Grande Water Conservation District
8805 Independence Way, Alamosa, CO 81101
or
Via Zoom

Call to Order

Heather Dutton called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. Those in attendance were introduced. A quorum was determined to be present.

The agenda was approved as presented.

The minutes of the July 11, 2023, meeting were approved as presented.

CWCB Update: Jeff Rodriguez, CWCB staff shared deadlines and funding reminders to the Roundtable. The next WSRF deadline is October 1st. CWCB is currently accepting applications for Wildfire Ready Watersheds, Technical Assistance, and the Local Capacity Grant Program. Nathan Coombs, CWCB Director, reported that all the WSRF applications from the Rio Grande were approved at the July meeting.

Colorado Division of Water Resources Update: Craig Cotten, Division Engineer, presented an update on the 2023 Rio Grande Compact. On the Rio Grande, preliminary annual flow at Del Norte 765,000 AF (118% of long-term average, obligation to downstream states – 237,400 AF (31% of flow). Current delivery obligation/curtailment is 17%. For the Conejos River System, the preliminary upper index annual flow is expected to be 430,00AF (143% of long-term average). Obligation to downstream states is 214,000AF (50%) and the current delivery obligation in irrigation season is 55%. Seasonal outlook for the upcoming fall/winter shows equal chance for above or below average precipitation, and the temperature outlook is likely above average. Craig provided additional information and updates and answered questions from those present.

Stakeholder Discussion of Water Issues with Congresswoman Boebert: Congresswoman Boebert provided the Roundtable updates on her current legislation and water priorities. Craig Cotten gave update on Rio Grande Compact and current lawsuit. The three states have reached a settlement and the settlement agreement was opposed by the United States. It is currently in front of the Supreme Court, there is a chance that the US would appeal. Heather Dutton expressed the need for continued vigilance around the Rio Grande Compact

Sally Weir, Colorado Open Lands, explained COL's programming focused on groundwater conservation, including the first every groundwater conservation easement. Sally described the Ground Water Conservation Easement Bill was introduced to the Farm Bill that would allocate funding through IRA and USDA to compensate landowners for groundwater conservation measures. Sally encouraged the Congresswoman's support of this bipartisan legislation.

Nathan Coombs asked about the Congressional Designated Spending process. Congresswoman Boebert explained this and also encouraged grant programs and other avenues to get projects funded.

Charlie Spielman stated the importance of infrastructure improvements for municipalities, especially for the small municipalities in the SLV with aging distribution systems.

Travis Smith noted that the Urban/Rural divide is widening. Ag is important to rural communities in Colorado.

Additional comments, questions, and discussion with the Congresswoman

PEPO Position: Hannah Thill with Rio Grande Watershed Conservation Education Initiative submitted a letter of interest to fill the open PEPO Liaison Position. Judy Lopez commented that Hannah will make great PEPO Liaison for the Roundtable. She is committed to education and will represent the Roundtable and Basin well. Judy moved to accept Hannah's letter of interest and appoint Hannah as the PEPO Liaison for the Rio Grande basin. Tim Lovato seconded the motion, which carried. Hannah commented that she looks forward to supporting the Roundtable's education efforts.

Kevin Terry, Trout Unlimited and Vice Chair RGBRT presented an overview of Water Based Recreation in the Rio Grande Basin and Local Multi-Purpose Partnership Projects. Multi-benefit plans in this basin including Colorado Water Plan/Basin Implementation Plan, Stream Management Plans, community planning, watershed assessments, agency plans. Out of these plans come multi-benefit projects, including Winter Flow Program, combined infrastructure and habitat projects, reservoir rehabilitation, process-based restoration, water lease/sharing, virtual fencing, forecasting, etc.

A panel of local outfitters and environmental experts discussed current challenges and opportunities in recreation. The panel included Jared Romero, Director of Strategic Partnerships with Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Joel Condren, owner/outfitters of 8200 Sports, Curt Howell, owner Narrow Ridge Outdoors, Jenny Nehring, with Wetland Dynamics and Monte Vista Crane Festival.

Jared Romero, Director of Strategic Partnerships with Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, started off discussing economic contributions of water related outdoor recreation in Colorado and the Rio Grande Basin. Based on the Business for Water Stewardship 2019 report, in the Rio Grande Basin, \$476.5 million dollars are contributed via water based recreation, 3,332 jobs supported by recreation on waterways, and 623,502 individuals participated (including water sports) annually.

The panel discussed the increase in recreation use during and after COVID and challenges related to this. This includes lack of infrastructure for the increase in use. Jenny explained that the MV Crane Festival provides incredible economic influx during a typically slow time of the winter/early spring. An economic study showed \$3.35million of direct income from the crane migration. Most attendees are from Colorado, outside of the SLV.

The increase in recreation use leads to infrastructure needs to support tourism and the recreation industry. A big concern for communities and businesses is affordable housing for employees to support the tourism/recreation economy. In addition, planning is important for the future of recreation, especially in the face of increased use. Recreation has an environmental impact and there is a need to work together to balance recreation impacts on the environment. Protected private lands in the SLV support habitat and wildlife.

Complex challenges facing recreation and tourism. People are coming to the SLV and we expect to see the increase in use continue into the future. Planning and foresight are needed as well as deliberate recreation infrastructure.

Judy noted that this is a unique nexus in the SLV where we have an opportunity to share and educate recreators about the environment, conservation, agriculture, and water.

Guides and outfitters have a unique opportunity to educate recreators and visitors of the SLV. However, outfitters see only a small percentage of those recreating. How do we educate the public? Crane Festival is a captive audience, there is an opportunity for education around water and conservation at this event.

Water Supply Reserve Fund Grant Previews

a. Sanchez Reservoir Project: Phase 3: Nicole Langley gave a preview of Phase 3 of the Sanchez Reservoir Project, which includes assessing engineering alternatives with AECOM, state engineer, and dam safety engineer to fix the dam's seepage and safety issues. The exact location of the seepage has been identified, and currently the reservoir is losing 2,500 acre feet/year and unable to irrigate 1,000 acres of land due to this issue. The quote for this phase of the project is between \$250,000 and \$400,000.

Charlie Spielman asked for clarification that all dams experience seepage, but that the Sanchez Reservoir is unsafe due to the significance of the seepage. Keith Caldon explained that the seepage has increased over the years indicating the issue has gotten worse, and the reservoir levels have been kept low since receiving the safety issue designation.

b. Las Mesitas Ditch: Peyton Valentine gave an overview of Las Mesitas Pipeline Ditch Project. They seek to install a pipeline through a problematic area of the ditch only, where there is porous soil and difficulty accessing for maintenance. In this section, there is 25% ditch loss. The project will consist of an inlet and outlet structure with a pipeline in between to reduce these losses, and will also help mitigate unwanted flooding and surface well contamination. They will be requesting \$23,695 from basin funds and \$55,286 from statewide funds. Landowners have secured additional funding from NRCS which totals \$131,000. Construction will begin November/December 2023.

Cary Aloia suggested speaking with the Habitat Conservation Plan Coordinator about potential impacts to willows.

Letter of Support for Acequia Association CWP Grant

Jock Jacober requested a letter of support from the Roundtable to support the Acequia Association's CWCB Local Capacity grant application to support staff to keep the association running smoothly. They are requesting \$50,000. Judy Lopez made a motion to send a letter of support, Kevin Terry seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

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

Daniel Boyes announced that the Costilla County Conservancy District is hiring a Watershed Coordinator. The position is open until filled, and the application can be found on their website. Please spread the word.

Judy Lopez thanked the Roundtable for her reappointment.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:00pm.

Notice of September Meetings:

Education Committee: September 12, 2023 at 10:00am at SLVWCD

Executive Committee: September 12, 2023 at 1:00pm at RGWCD

Roundtable Meeting: September 12, 2023 at 2:00pm at RGWCD