

Interbasin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables
Rio Grande Basin Roundtable
MEETING MINUTES
February 11, 2025
Rio Grande Water Conservation District
Alamosa, Colorado

Amber Pacheco called the meeting to order.

Introductions were made and it was determined a quorum was met.

The agenda was approved as presented.

Keith Holland moved to approve minutes from the January 14, 2025 meeting. The motion was seconded and passed.

Public Comment:

Paul Formisano reminded everyone that the State of the Basin is March 29th, 2025, and that registration is live.

Sue Swift-Miller provided an update that the Lobatos Bridge Outdoor Recreation Project has been fully funded. The ribbon cutting is proposed for September of 2025 and she would like to work with the community to get the signage done because it needs to go to the printer by May.

Adam Moore reported the 2-3-2 Partnership Meeting will be held on February 27th and 28th at Ghost Ranch. It will then be followed on Saturday, March 1st, by the Rio Chama Congreso meeting, also at Ghost Ranch. A short video on the forest health work happening at Rock Creek was shown.

Patrick Ortiz reported Senator Hickenlooper is going to be staying on the Energy & Natural Resource Committee. He also mentioned the XR Forest Act that the house has passed and that the Senator is leading the charge on a senate version and they will be doing some outreach on it soon.

Amber Pacheco reported the Congreso de Acequias is happening March 8th at Centennial High School and the Crane Festival will be in Monte Vista on March 7th-9th.

Update from the Colorado Division of Water Resources:

Craig Cotten reported snowpack is not great and he is seeing 60-70% in most areas with some areas as low as the 30% range. He suggested the water year is looking similar to 2003. Irrigation season is expected to start on April 1st, but an earlier start is possible. He also gave an update on the Rio Grande Compact Update. A meeting with the Engineer Advisors will be in Albuquerque on March 10th. As a State, we will have 5-6,000 in credit. In regards to the

Compact lawsuit, he will be attending a mediation session in Pittsburg in a couple weeks and is hoping to reach a resolution with the other three states and the federal government, but trial is possible. The Compact Meeting will be held April 25th in Alamosa, Colorado.

CWCB Update:

Jeff Rodriguez, CWCB, reported the Climate and Water Workshops will be held on April 3rd and April 23rd. The workshops are a collaboration between the CWCB and Colorado State University. The first one will be in Pueblo at CSU Pueblo on April 3rd and the second one will be held at Clifton Community Center on April 23rd. The workshops are free to attend but you do have to RSVP. Jeff also reported the Agricultural Emergency Drought Program provides up to \$1 million in loans and grants for emergency drought-related water augmentation to agricultural water users. The deadline to apply is April 15th, 2025. A couple of CWCB reports are officially available now. One is the Water Plan Progress Report which details all the work that CWCB is doing on the Agency Actions. The other one is the 10 Strategies to Protect Irrigated Agriculture, which is a culmination of Agency Action 2.6, focusing on the value agriculture provides to Colorado. Another one is the Floatovoltaics Report, directed by Senate Bill 23-092, to determine the feasibility of Floatovoltaics as a means to increasing the beneficial consumptive use of state waters.

Other important info:

April 1st- No more Statewide WSRF funding

June 1st- Deadline for PEPO Basin Coordinator Grants and PEPO Statewide grants

July 1st- Deadline for Water Plan Grant

February 26th, 2025 - IBCC meeting

March 19-20th- next CWCB meeting in Greeley

Report of Executive Committee Meeting:

Amber Pacheco reported discussion was held regarding a session at the Colorado Water Congress Meeting regarding risk assessments for municipal water systems. It was suggested that a possible workshop or group meeting could be held with the San Luis Valley Emergency Preparedness and Response Team. It was unknown if municipalities in the Valley were aware of this requirement to do this risk assessment. It was suggested Amber reach out to Dave Osborn to see what can be done.

Amber also reported the Executive Committee discussed the funding limitations this year. The Rio Grande Basin Fund will be replenished with \$300,000 in November but it was suggested the Roundtable needs to determine how to move forward and how to prioritize that \$300,000. Amber was asked to reach out to other Roundtables to ask how they handle prioritizing funding in their Basins. Info will be gathered and brought back to the Executive Committee and the Roundtable.

Amber received a request regarding moving the date of the Roundtable meeting from Tuesdays to accommodate the Saguache County Commissioner's schedule. Some of the comments from the Roundtable members were the current time works if you are trying to make it to multiple roundtables around the State. It was suggested Saguache County does have representation on

the Roundtable and all meetings are recorded and the minutes are available. Others commented people have come to rely on the meeting being on the second Tuesday of the month and some suggested we have technology and material available for those who cannot attend in person or virtually. Amber Pacheco will relay the comments back to the party who requested the change.

Kevin Terry is stepping down from the IBCC seat he currently holds so there is an open seat for the Rio Grande Basin. If anyone is interested, they should submit a letter of interest to the Roundtable.

Update from Education Committee:

Cassandra McCuen gave an update on the Education Committee meeting in mid-January regarding the 2025 Education Plan. In March, there will be a presentation on streamflow forecasting and Snotels. In April there will be a Rio Grande Compact presentation in collaboration with the Roundtable Education Committee and the Salazar Center at Adams State University. Friday Feb. 21st a tour will be held at Russell Lake State Wildlife Area for the sheet ice. On March 14th, the Dust on Snow Tour at Wolf Creek will be held but an RSVP is required. More tours will be announced later this year.

Discussion of Round Table Support of the San Luis Valley Irrigation District's Rio Grande Reservoir Low-flow Pipeline Project

Heather Dutton led a discussion regarding an update on the discussions she and Nathan Coombs have had with the San Luis Valley Irrigation District (SLVID). Some history was presented about the Rio Grande Reservoir project and around the issues with operating the valves in the winter. In October, the Roundtable directed Heather Dutton and Nathan Coombs to be the delegation to meet with the SLVID. Heather reported they had talked to the SLVID Board about potential options and also visited with CWBC staff who were supportive of adaptive management. The SLVID open to pursuing a way to do winter releases if they had help. Heather worked with SLVID to submit a Colorado Water Plan Grant (WPG) application on December 1st. San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District is helping with the designs of a low-flow pipeline. BLM has expressed their support in helping move the project forward and the Trinchera Blanca Foundation has also stepped up in support. The SLVID could use some additional support for the WPG application so Heather drafted a letter of support from the Roundtable which was shared out to the Roundtable members prior to the meeting. Heather mentioned that Kevin noted that the language "reasserts its view" is incorrect and be corrected to "finally the Round Tables asserts that"

Cole Bedford, CWCB, stated the CWCB Board will vote on this WPG application in March. He also advised that a statement from the Roundtable is an important consideration and carries weight in the CWCB's consideration of funding.

Kevin Terry, Trout Unlimited, stated an appreciation of the letter because it can benefit the Winter Flow Program. He stated the Winter Flow Program is completely voluntary and it was never a guarantee in this project. He said it was an important step for this pipeline to move

forward and for the project to have the trust of the community. There was extensive discussion regarding winter releases from the reservoir and the benefits of that program for the community.

Robert Hurd asked it be noted in the minutes Hinsdale County Commissioners support the Low-Flow Pipeline Project.

A community member in attendance expressed concern that the money given to SLVID was to also support recreation and the environment on the Rio Grande and the issues were not just about the wintertime operations. They asked when this issue would be addressed. Kevin Terry addressed that by explaining through the work of Trout Unlimited, they have created a catalyst for a funding opportunity that can be leveraged to hopefully jump start collaboration to create more recreation year-round by working to provide information to farmers about how the release of stored water benefits the farm and benefits others for recreation. Nathan Coombs added that water still has to be released and used according to Colorado Water Law.

Further discussion was held regarding the need for more communication on how the reservoir is being operated and also about the river flows. Daniel Boyes shared that there is progress on a website that would help with sharing information regarding real-time flows and reservoir operations. Brian Puccerella, Recreation Representative, stated when his entity has had a specific ask for recreation flows, they have had success. He said he would be happy to meet with community members to come up with a specific ask. A community member also shared concern about flows affecting the bugs and fish of the river.

Amber Pacheco stated that the Roundtable is open for more discussion on this and stopped the discussion after a call from Roundtable Members to move to a vote. Virginia Christensen made a motion to approve the Letter of Support with suggested edits from the Roundtable Members. Cassandra McCuen seconded the motion and the motion passed. During further discussion, Cindy Medina disagreed with supporting the letter and felt as a board the Roundtable should not take sides in regards to the grant without more community discussion. A Member asked that the term "whole heartedly" in the second paragraph in the first sentence of the draft letter be deleted. With removal of this wording, the letter will read "the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable supports the Low-Flow Pipeline Project and the application for the Water Plan Grant funding." Virginia asked this correction to the letter be included in her motion. Virginia amended her motion to support the project with this letter with the edits suggested by the membership. The motion was seconded and the motion passed. Two Members voted no and majority voted yes to pass motion in favor.

Discussion of IBCC's efforts to create a Drought Resilience Action Plan-Cary Aloia and Heather Dutton:

Jeff Rodriguez started the discussion by describing the past IBCC goals to develop these types of plans. The Plan will be open for discussion again at the next IBCC Meeting. The Drought Resilience Action Plan was envisioned as a way to build some consensus around actions to make Colorado more drought resilient. There was further discussion about the Roundtable's

role in the process. Amber Pacheco reminded those interested in learning more the IBCC to listen in on their meeting on February 26th.

**Funding Final Presentation for the Alamosa-La Jara Water Conservancy District:
Alamosa River Water Delivery Improvement Project Phase II**

Nikita Cooper presented the project for the Alamosa-La Jara Water Conservancy District. She stated the project will involve installing measurement infrastructure on several ditches and a sluice gate at one of the ditches. This project helps focus on the Basin's goals of helping to maintain agricultural and water administration, sustaining agricultural operations. The request is for funding from the Roundtable of \$61,000, with matching funds of \$54,500. Of this match, the Alamosa-La Jara Water Conservancy District is \$25,000 and the remaining will come from landowner contributions. Timeframe for the project is beginning of Fall 2025 and will be finished by Fall of 2027. Cindy Medina made a motion to approve this project. Dwight Martin stated that he would abstain. The motion was seconded and motion passed. Project was approved for \$61,000 of Rio Grande Basin funds.

Update from Emily and Fay with American Rivers regarding Funding Opportunities:

Emily Wolf updated the members on the freeze on federal funds. The Funding Database can be found on the Basin Roundtables funding page on the website. The update on the Inflation Reduction Act award is that there has been progress with Reclamation and there is a meeting Friday with the Bureau of Reclamation discussing how to move forward. Pauses on the Notice of Funding Opportunities should resume on February 24th, pending on internal review, and they will keep everyone posted.

The Meeting was adjourned.