

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

Call to Order 2pm

Amber Pacheco called the meeting to order.

Introductions were made and quorum was met for Roundtable Members.

Amber Pacheco proposed an addition to the agenda to discuss writing a letter in regards to the good projects that we support and our concerns about the federal funding cuts. Cassandra McCuen made a motion to approve the agenda with the addition. Brian Puccarella seconded the motion. The agenda was approved with the addition.

Charles Spielman made a motion to approve the minutes from the February 11th, 2025, meeting. The motion was seconded by Jim Ehrlich and passed.

Public Comment:

Tony Aloia announced the geotechnical work at Beaver Reservoir will start at the end of this month.

Paul Formisano reported the State of the Basin Symposium will be held on Saturday the 29th of March and the Salazar Center, in cooperation with the Roundtable, is sponsoring a talk with Bill Paddock and David Robbins about the Rio Grande Compact.

Cassandra McCuen reported on the Community Ag Social being held this Friday the 14th from 5-7pm at the Oasis in Saguache. The purpose is to catch up with fellow ag community members.

Kevin Terry announced April 25th is the tentative date for restocking Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout. The event will be happening near Questa, New Mexico

Amber Pacheco announced the 25th of April is the Rio Grande Compact Meeting here in Alamosa. and will start at 9am.

Patrick Ortiz announced Senator Hickenlooper is hosting a virtual town hall tomorrow evening, the 12th at 5pm.

Colorado Division of Water Resources Update:

Pat McDermott joined the meeting virtually from Albuquerque where he is attending the Annual Engineer Advisor Meeting for the Rio Grande Compact. He reported the day was full of reports

from the Feds and there is overall concern of what projects will be funded in the future. There will be very little immediate impact to our Colorado area, but there is a lot of concern throughout the Rio Grande Basin about the funding restrictions that could eliminate or postpone planned activities by the Bureau of Reclamation and the Corp. of Engineers.

He reported the last snowpack he pulled for the Basin indicated 67% of the average throughout the basin. In the northern part of the basin, the SNOTELs are reporting higher than the southern part, which is reporting in the 30-50% average snowpack. The average period has been shifted forward and no longer considers the wet 1980s. Currently comparing runoff in 2025 to low years like 2018, which was the 4th worst year for runoff in the Rio Grande Basin. In the south end of the Valley, we do not think it will be a good flow and will see peak flow in May. Without significant rain we would expect the streams to go back to base flow earlier than normal June. The good news is there is a potential for a normal monsoon pattern to come into the Upper Rio Grande Basin in June/July/August time frame. We are still seeing the effects of La Nina right now, so drier and warmer temperatures are expected for the next 90 days. He thanked our friends over at NRCS for all the help they do with forecasting.

Cassandra McCuen if now that these numbers have shifted, could he estimate based on the previous time period where we would be? Pat answered we would have an 8-15% difference. Generally, an 8-15% difference from the old reference period (1981 to 2010) to the current reference period (which is now from 1991-2020).

Karl Wetlaufer with NRCS mentioned anyone can query the difference between the old reference period to the new reference period for the different stations and see a comparison of the shift on their website.

Pat reported the 2025 Irrigation will start on April 1st. The exception is Conejos and La Jara Creek who are looking to start as early as March 24. The Irrigation Season typically ends at midnight on Nov 1st. There was one variance approved off the La Jara Creek and the variance approval is applicable to both surface rights and wells. He asked if you see someone using their irrigation well before the start of irrigation season, your tip would remain anonymous, as fair is fair. He also reported groundwater estimation notices went out to people and it is important that people get back to Kevin at DWR.

Charlie Spielman asked if the snowpack of 67% was measured before or after the latest storm. Pat responded the measurement was after the last storm.

Pat added the Bureau of Reclamation reported the Lower Rio Grande Basin snowpack varies from 0% to 25%. Colorado will not be allowed to increase storage in Platoro Reservoir this year because we expect to remain in Article 7 storage restrictions throughout 2025.

CWCB Updates: Jeff Rodriguez and Nathan Coombs

Jeff Rodriguez reported the CWCB Board Meeting is coming up next week on Wednesday and Thursday March 19th and 20th. Gov. Polis announced three new representatives that will be

joining the CWCB Board. The new Board Members are Greg Johnson for the City and County of Denver, Taylor Hawes for the Colorado River, and Mike Camblin for the Yampa-White Basin. Jeff also announced the Diane Hoppe Scholarship is open now and will close April 1st. It is a one-year scholarship for high school students or college freshmen interested in western water. Applicants must attend a public high school or college in Colorado. Climate Workshops will be held coming on April 3rd and 23rd and registration is open. Audiences for these workshops are local water professionals and local climate professionals looking to engage with the community. The April 3rd workshop will be held at CSU Pueblo and the 23rd Workshop will be held in Cliffton. Both are from 1-5 pm and they are free but attendees must rsvp for the in-person only meetings. The Ag Emergency Drought Program can fund up to a million dollars in grants or loans to agriculture and agricultural agencies in counties where an emergency declaration has been proclaimed. April 15th deadline. A number of CWCB reports have been released including the Collaborative Water Sharing Agreements.

Upcoming deadlines:

April 1st is WSRF deadline

July 1st is Water Plan Grant deadline

June 1st is PEPO Basin Coordinator & PEPO Statewide Grants deadline

Erin Minks asked about the budget picture for this year. Jeff responded it is still going through the legislative cycle. There was a vote to approve staff suggestions to transfer interest from the Cash Funds but exempted the CWCB's Construction Fund and the Water Plan Implementation Cash Fund. These were recommendations from Kirkmeyer's office. In total it will protect \$17 million in water projects in the coming years. Generally, the budget is set with the Long Bill but it is expected to go through the ringer after the March Economic Forecast.

Nathan Coombs reported the CWCB is supporting bills that support weather forecasting and those bills are continuing through the legislative process. Amber Pacheco reported she and Nathan were able to testify to the House in support of the bill. Nathan testified for the Valley and Amber testified for State Affairs.

Cary Aloia reported on the last IBCC meeting. One main thing was a subcommittee was formed to help determine what the overall direction is going to be for the IBCC Board and to guide the agenda for the next C-9 Summit. If there is anyone with ideas or thoughts for this next year's C-9 Summit please reach out to Cary, Jeff, Nathan or CWCB. There was also a lot about the Colorado River. Jeff added the subcommittee is meeting on Friday morning 9-10 am in a virtual meeting to orient themselves on what their tasks are. Anyone is welcome to come. Nathan reported something else to be aware of is the CDPHE rulemaking for the GAP Waters legislation. There is a lot of misunderstanding around what the authority really is. Cary Aloia they are looking at the exemptions for agriculture water and for multi-benefit water which is what we have fought to get exemptions so that we can maintain our ditches for augmentation, wildlife, or irrigation. The other issue to watch is a five-year renewal for any long-term project. This would set a precedent. This is something we need to consider how best to respond. June is when they are going to be making decisions about the rules. The next zoom meeting is coming

up on March 20th with CDPHE. Cary suggested we need to be sending in comments. Jeff received an email from the CDPHE staff asking if they should do another trip to the roundtables. Jeff thinks they should and he will respond as such. There was discussion regarding a set of talking points. Jeff reported Mark Shea did have a good presentation at the IBCC meeting and he should have a recording of the presentation that he could send around.

Amber Pacheco asked Jeff for guidance on what the Roundtable is allowed to do or not do regarding commenting on federal funding and staffing issues. Jeff responded we are in unprecedented territory. He felt it would be more impactful to comment as individuals and not as a roundtable as things of a federal nature can be touchy at a state level as we are working closely with federal partners. Some good news is FEMA grants for floodplain mapping and for recovery implementation programs are still functioning normally and still ok.

Erin Minks of Senator Bennet's office suggested a comment letter that is detached from the money is good. She suggested folks reach out to the Secretary of AG and Secretary of Interior.

Charlie Spielman made a suggestion to ask the Division 3 Engineering staff for their recommendation on how we could and should renegotiate the Rio Grande Compact to take into account the current conditions. Amber responded that her understanding of the position of Colorado regarding that issue is that they will not renegotiate the contract and think that is working very well for Colorado. Charlie felt if we ask for the recommendation, it gives us a set of data points to tell us if we should or should not ask. The Rio Grande Compact was negotiated at a time either during or after a high runoff and that no longer exists. Amber responded that her opinion is that Colorado could lose a lot but she will bring that comment to DWR when she next sees them.

Presentation on Streamflow forecasting and SNOTELS by Karl Wetlaufer, NRCS Hydrologist

The presentation went over the amount of SNOTEL sites there are in the west and in Colorado specifically. The anatomy of a SNOTEL was shown along with the tools used at the sites to measure, including the upgrades that have been implemented. Karl talked about the collaboration with different organizations that has greatly helped and about the two newest sites in the Rio Grande, one north of Creede on Rat Creek and one near El Wood Pass. Both sites are at 11,000 ft. Karl then answered questions on the difference between SNOTEL (automated) and snow course (manual). There was discussion regarding why you want SNOTEL to be measured under tree line so as to not be affected by wind, but they are working on getting more information from above timberline. He noted that they are now using six models to help with their forecasts. There was discussion of how citizen science would be helpful.

San Luis Valley Wildfire Council Update

A group of partners met to discuss how to coordinate to reduce the wildfire risk in communities. Coordination is needed to prevent forest fires. Adam Moore talked about their membership, goals, and priorities. He went on to explain the grants they have received and have applied for that continue to fund their efforts. The Council will meet every two months. Conversation was

had about how there are opportunities for the SLV Wildfire Council and the Roundtable to work together.

Education Committee Update:

Cassandra McCuen reported the Dust on Snow Tour will be this Friday at 10am. Registration is closed but if you want to go, please let her know. She also reported April 10th there will be a Colorado Rio Grande Compact tour from 9am-2pm. Next month we will have Dr. Katherine James back to give an update on the SLV Groundwater Quality Study, which she presented on last year.

Executive Committee Report:

Amber reported the Executive Committee talked about a letter from the Roundtable regarding federal issues. She also reported that she did reach out to other Roundtable Chairs regarding the prioritization of funding and most of them do not have rules to prioritize. One group out of Yampa-White-Green Area had a matrix they do use to rate projects but they don't have to prioritize projects. That matrix score is included in their letters of support for funding. It is a tool that they use, but the committee was not sure if it is what we need but a good suggestion of listing things out and making our own matrix.

Update from Emily and Fay with American Rivers regarding funding opportunities:

Emily shared the link to the funding opportunity database on the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable website. They continue to update the database as there are some pauses and uncertainties about the Federal opportunities. There is one grant that is live and due very soon for the second round for the EPA Thriving Community Grant for Region 8. Emily shared the exciting news that Cary and Jenny, who worked closely with CSU Extension and Ducks Unlimited, were awarded a Tier-3 EPA grant in the first cycle to support the winter sheet ice revegetation efforts. They are also looking to expand this project through a CWCB Water Plan Grant. If anyone is interested in participating, let Cary know.

Meeting was adjourned.