

Interbasin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables
Rio Grande Basin Roundtable
MEETING MINUTES
April 8th, 2025
Rio Grande Water Conservation District
Alamosa, Colorado

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

Introductions were made and a quorum was determined.

The agenda was approved as presented.

Cassandra McCuen made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 11th, 2025, meeting. The motion was seconded by Heather Dutton and passed.

Public Comment

Paul Formisano thanked everyone for their attendance at the Symposium and announced the videos from the day are online on the Salazar Center webpage. The Water 101 class will be held again in the fall and it is available to community members. Some scholarship money is available to support attendance.

Richard Hubler invited everybody to the Waverly Community Center at 7 p.m. this evening for a conversation about the Alamosa County Comprehensive Plan. The County received some money from the CWCB to focus on water in the Plan.

Robert Sakata reported the USDA has declared La Plata County as a disaster county. Saguache, Mineral, Rio Grande, Conejos are also considered disaster counties as they continue to be affected by drought (Alamosa and Costilla counties were not included in the declaration). Amber Pacheco asked if the CWCB funding for ag drought emergency was still available or if we were past the deadline. Jeff Rodriguez responded part of the requirement for the ag funding is the applicant is within a drought county and the related expenses were incurred in 2024.

Amber Pacheco provided an update for Sue Swift-Miller regarding the Lobatos Bridge project. A Save the Date for the Outdoor Classroom and Recreation Enhancement project for Friday September 26th 11 a.m-1 p.m., at the Lobatos Bridge.

CWCB Updates: Jeff Rodriguez and Nathan Coombs

Nathan Coombs reported HB25-1115 is moving through the process. This bill will help with forecasting in the Rio Grande Basin and around the State. HB25-1323 deals with CPW and

making recreation more viable within the rivers. This bill would address a lot of the work roundtables are already doing with the community. Nathan also reminded the group of two CWCB documents which included a progress report from the Colorado Water Plan and a CWCB Guide. Both these documents can be found online at the CWCB website. The next meeting will be in May in Steamboat.

Jeff Rodriguez provided an update from the CWCB Board meeting in March. Thirty projects were awarded Water Plan Grants, totaling up to \$ 6.4 million. There were fourteen WSRF projects totaling \$4.1 million. The 2nd Annual One Water Day will take place in conjunction with the Watershed Summit at the Denver Botanic Gardens on June 20th. The theme this year is “Managing Water in Thriving Communities”.

Jeff also provided a water supply update. Statewide the snowpack average is about 86% of normal and reservoir levels are at 91%. The Drought Monitor is indicating worsening drought conditions and a quicker melt out across the state. The Water Conditions Monitoring Committee’s next meeting/webinar is April 22nd from 9:30-11 a.m. This meeting will be recorded and available on the CWCB YouTube channel.

Jeff provided a few additional updates. The 1051 data reporting deadline is June 30th for CY2024, and includes the M36 water loss audit. They offer free training for the M36 audit. Anyone with questions can reach out to Kevin Reidy or Sam Stein. The Agricultural Emergency Drought Program is still open and the deadline is April 15th. Nora Flynn is the contact for this program. This Program provides \$1 million annually for agricultural water users for augmentation purchases related to federal and state drought designation. Water Plan Grant deadline is July 1st and Laura Spann is the contact. The PEPO deadline is June 1st. Jeff will be on parental leave and Jenna Battson at CWCB will be the contact during his time away.

Presentation from Committee for a Healthy Rio Grande

Jim Loud provided a statement from the Committee for a Healthy Rio Grande in response to the question of “What do we want?” which was asked at a previous RGBRT Meeting. A copy of the statement is attached as part of these minutes. Jim stated the 2018 \$25 million phase two grant request described the Cooperative Project as a project to develop partnerships between the State and the District and to achieve multiple benefits through coordination of reservoir releases to enhance the environment and to provide recreation flow while meeting compact requirements. He said that is what the Committee would like to see become reality. Nathan Coombs asked for a little more clarification on what type of meetings the committee would want to see happen. There was discussion regarding how more coordination could occur with the understanding that this would all take time and would not be easy. Trout Unlimited talked about working with CPW to release water throughout the year to have sustainable flows as an example of how coordination is already happening for the purposes the committee is concerned about. It was stressed that there is

not a lot of water available and it cannot be released if it is not there. Discussion continued with Nathan Coombs explaining how strategic reservoir releases happen in the summer and how those occur. He reminded everyone the use of water is driven by the those who own the water and that the water has to have a specific legal use. The discussion concluded with a request the Committee come to the RT with specific details of what exactly they would like to see happen to help the conversation continue. Cassandra McCuen made a motion to move on to the next topic and Jim seconded and passed.

Presentation on San Luis Valley Water Quality Study-Dr. Kathy James and Dr. Ryan Smith

Dr. Kathy James presented on arsenic concentrations and groundwater in the San Luis Valley along with her colleague Dr. Ryan Smith. This is a four-year project and the focus has been on how the levels of arsenic, manganese, tungsten, uranium, and cadmium are changing and how the drought has been affecting these metals in the drinking supply. Her main focus of this study is on the health impacts of these changes. Dr. Smith explained where arsenic can be found, what influences higher concentrations of arsenic in water, and how arsenic can be complicated. Dr. James explained there were gaps in the water quality data and that through a community project, 840 household participants in the Valley sent in water samples from drinking water sources. In the 2nd phase they are looking at 18 metals, hardness, and isotopes. So far, they are finding arsenic is a concern, uranium tends to not like to be where arsenic is, and that tungsten is similar in toxicity to arsenic. They have found that some wells are drawing 7,000-year-old water, another one 20,000-year-old water. Dr. Smith discussed some of the things driving arsenic, like: pumping, clay, depth, and geothermal influence. Conejos and Rio Grande counties have increased in levels while others have decreased or remained the same. They are also seeing that there is some surface elevation change with groundwater pumping. This study is ongoing.

A question was asked about how many wells exceeded the EPA number? The answer was: out of the wells tested, 25% have an elevated metal, five wells have elevated lead, and 10% had 2 or more elevated metals. Discussion then moved to how to remove those metals at home. Dr. James explained reverse osmosis is the best solution but is not very affordable. Her program is working with Arizona State University for low-cost filters that focus on arsenic and uranium and her next project is testing these filters.

Colorado Division of Water Resources Update

Pat McDermott reported we are the lowest basin in the state at 63% of average snowpack. The year looks like we are heading to another 2018 which was the 4th worst year on record. Medano Creek is not going to have a lot of water at the Sand Dunes this year. Pat also reminded everyone that our new reference for the average is 1991-2020. As of March 20th, they are expecting warm and dry conditions through June with July-Sept. possibly seeing the El Nino bring some moisture for a normal monsoon. The irrigation season started on April 1st with the exception of the

Conejos River and La Jara Creek which started March 24th. He said he is expecting an early runoff peak

The Rio Grande Compact Annual Meeting is Friday April 25th at the RGWCD.

Education Committee Update

Cassandra McCuen noted the RGBRT Newsletter for the Spring was sent out via email with lots of great resources. Cary Aloia and Jenny Nehring wrote an article about the Russell Lake State Wildlife Area where they recently hosted a RT tour. Paul Formisano organized a talk with Bill Paddock and David Robbins at ASU from 3-5 p.m. on April 24th regarding the Rio Grande Compact history. The City of Alamosa is doing Water Week which will include a master gardener presentation on Thursday and water treatment plant tours. The Education Committee will be taking over trivia at the Spare Keg for Water Week. The Colorado Compact Tour is Thursday April 10th and the last day to sign up is April 8th. Next month we will have Jeff Derry give an update on Dust on Snow this season. The Education Committee is working on the 2025/2026 PEPO grant application and will talk more about what they have put together and ask for a letter of support at the next Roundtable meeting.

Executive Meeting Report

Amber Pacheco reported we will be having expiring terms in July. A list will be prepared of whose terms are up to allow time to get letters for those who want to continue serving in the seat. Funding for the WSRF Program was also discussed. The RT should start seeing previews for the July meeting for projects that have been waiting for funding to be renewed. The RGBRT will be limited to \$300,000.00 for the year. She asked members if they know of anyone thinking of projects to let them know June/July would be a good time for them to start talking to the Roundtable.

Questionnaire for We Are Water Exhibit at Alamosa Public Library

Amber Pacheco described a project being done by a group called We Are Water. They have funding from CSU to create a water project to be permanently displayed at the Alamosa Public Library. The group put together a short questionnaire to help provide input on what this project should be and what information is important to include. They would also like to share stories from local experts and water users about water in the Valley as part of this project and are asking if anyone is interested in providing their story.

4:15 adjourned.