

NPBRT Meeting Minutes: 3-23-21

Members/Liaisons present

*Ty Wattenberg
*Rick Wyatt
*Jim Dustin
*Coby Corkle
*Blaine Evans
*Pat VanValkenberg
*Wade Allnut
*Mike Allnut
*Mark Hackleman
*Carl Trick
*Kari VanValkenberg
Aleigh Aurin (CSU Extension)
Blair Rynearson (State Forest)

Members/Liaisons participating remotely

*Randy Miller
*Barbara Vasquez
David Graf (CPW)

Non-RT members present

Deb Heeney
Deb Alpe
Soraya Baroumand

Non-RT members participating remotely

Scott Gustin
Sam Stein (CWCB)
Russ Sands (CWCB)
Carolina Manriquez (State Forest)
John Twitchell (State Forest)

This meeting was held in a multimodal approach with 14 people attending physically and 8 via zoom.

Thanks to Sam Stein for zoom support for the remote participations.

And because of the very appreciated help of Aleigh Aurin, CSU Extension Agent, we had internet connection and she also provided microphones and speakers to try to improve on the remote participation experience we've had in past meetings held in the same location. Even with this much welcomed technology boost, at times it was very difficult for those participating remotely to hear and understand those in the room who were speaking, as can be heard in the recording which is available here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqcg8mentc8>

The comments and presentations by those participating remotely are captured well.

1-Agenda Review

Agenda accepted as presented.

2) Review/Approval of Sept meeting minutes

Skipped

3) Membership changes

Ty updated the membership with two additions:

Town of Walden- Mayor Jim Dustin

Legislative Liaison- Bryce Russell

These changes are reflected in the updated membership list distributed last month and will also be attached with these minutes as well.

NPBRT Meeting Minutes: 3-23-21

The remainder of the meeting was dedicated to reviewing and deciding on whether to support 5 WSRA grant applications summarized in the table below.

	Basin	Match	State
Owl Mountain-11 devices/8 ditches	\$320,537	\$150,136	
Owl Mountain-Homestead Ditch	\$111,920	\$135,410	
Aqua Fria Reservoir 2	\$75,000	\$25,000	
JCWCD Cloud Seeding 2	\$225,000	\$93,000	
State Forest	\$50,000	\$400,000	\$50,000
	\$782,457		\$50,000

The current basin fund balance is \$992,165.

4) Forest & Watershed Health project WSRF application

Blair Rynearson, Colorado State Forest

Blair briefly summarized the CSF project for forest and watershed health which had been presented to the RT in considerable detail at our 9/21/20 meeting and for which the formal application was distributed in advance of the 11/17/20 meeting (cancelled for lack of quorum). The application requests \$50k Basin funds and \$50k State funds to be combined with funds from other sources.

Abstract: Nearly half of the forest in the North Platte Basin is spruce-subalpine fir. The rest is dominated by lodgepole pine which has been heavily impacted by mountain pine bark beetle. Colorado State Forest is working towards removing dead standing and diversifying age class and species. The project is based on a collaboration with Adaptive Silviculture for Climate change in spruce/fir forest. It will involve 400 acres, with 300 acres divided into three 100 acre plots with different harvest treatment and one 100 acre plot left untouched. With climate change the expectation is increasing fire risk, so they will be looking for resistance, resilience and transition to bigger openings. Data will be collected before treatment and then at 1, 5, 10 and 20 years. This work is important not only to the North Platte Basin but to the state, since it is estimated 75% of annual water source in Colorado comes from these high elevation forest and flows to an array of downstream consumers.

Following Blair's brief presentation, Ty called for an informal straw poll. Several RT members expressed a lack of willingness to support this project, complaining that more study wasn't needed, that everything we needed to know about forest management was already known. This reaction was countered by comments by John Twitchell and Carolina Manriquez explaining that there was much to be learned about forest resilience and water production from stressed watersheds that would be important to this basin and others in Colorado for science-based forest management in the near future in this basin and others in Colorado. In spite of the countervailing comments, the vote was 7 no to 5 yes with 1 abstention.

5) Aqua Fria Reservoir – part 2

Scott Gustin, Telesoto Solutions with John & Sharon Harvat, Lucky Penny Ranch

Scott presented a brief powerpoint to give a summary of Part 1 of this project that received basin funds in 2017 for this reservoir rehabilitation that supported field seasons in 2019 and

NPBRT Meeting Minutes: 3-23-21

2020. The accomplishments of that project have been reviewed with the RT previously. It involved a permit for the USFS for Beaver Creek Trail improvements to create a road to support heavy equipment transport. In 2019 they also removed debris from the reservoir. HDPE pipe installation was completed as were new headgates and trash racks installations. Part 2 requests \$75k basin funds to support pending objectives for the 2021 field season, which include developing a plan required by the State Engineer, completing shotcrete repair and resurfacing of the Aqua Fria dam face and installing a V-notch weir downstream of the reservoir outlet. A question was asked how the trash rack could be cleaned. Scott explained that it is a very heavy gage steel structure that is bolted onto the dam. It would have to be unbolted and lifted in sections by heavy equipment to clean. A question was asked whether the \$75k would be sufficient to complete the objectives- Scott replied that it would.

David Graf, CPW, asked about the environmental claims of the application. What sort of environmental water is being used or is it just the incidental benefits of the irrigated agriculture. Scott's answer was the water has a dual purpose...one is to support irrigated hay and grazing for livestock and the other co-benefit is providing nesting habitat for waterfowl.

Ty called for a vote of the RT members: 11 yes, 0 no. In voting, Barbara expanded on David's point, underscoring the importance of clarifying claims of environmental benefit in these applications as direct or indirect with sufficient detail to understand what is being claimed.

6) Owl Mountain Partnership: 8 ditches/11 devices

Deb Heeney, NRCS & Debbie Alpe, Owl Mountain Partnership

Debbie Alpe introduced this group of projects including 10 shovel ready projects involving 8 ditches and 11 structures. The request is for \$320,537 in basin funds. The total cost of the projects is \$470,673. All of the projects are headgates, measuring devices and turnouts. Some are replacing old structures, others are new structures. Deb Heeney explained all projects will be overseen by the NRCS engineer out of Steamboat Springs. The engineer will meet with the contractor before the projects and will oversee the projects. Owl Mountain will charge 5% for administration. All of the projects have approved permits. All meet the requirement for 25% match between water right owner and NRCS, with the average near 33%. After brief discussion, Ty called for a vote of the RT members: 10 yes, 2 recusals and 1 no. Barbara expressed concerns about new projects that come to the RT on such short notice, referring to our previous NPBRT rules where WSRA applications were heard in one meeting and the vote to support was conducted at a subsequent meeting. She suggested we consider reinstating this practice to provide the voting members and liaisons, many of whom have FT jobs, to have adequate time to review the details of the projects and get answers to their questions.

7) Owl Mountain Partnership-Homestead Ditch

Deb Heeney, NRCS & Debbie Alpe, Owl Mountain Partnership

Deb Alpe introduced the second project from Owl Mountain Partnership. It's for pipeline structure requesting \$111,920 basin funds with a match of \$135,410 (56%) for a total project cost of \$247,330. It is a new 24" ABS pipeline for the Homestead Ditch that will irrigate ~300 acres. Owners have had longstanding difficulty keeping the ditch open and if they can't use the water, they'll lose the right. The difficulty keeping the ditch open is due to the instability of the soils below the ditch resulting in continual sloughing. A question was asked about the experience of Ft Collins with the Michigan Ditch where soils, when they got saturated, didn't

NPBRT Meeting Minutes: 3-23-21

hold their pipeline and the entire structure came down the mountainside. Deb Heeney explained if there is irrigation above the pipeline, that might be a problem but the NRCS engineers believed it would be stable in this case. She clarified that nothing is 100% guaranteed. Ty called for the vote of RT members: 12 yes, 1 no.

8) North Platte Basin Airborne Cloud Seeding Project (B)

Pat VanValkenberg, Jackson County Water Conservancy District

Pat introduced this project to support a second season for airborne cloud seeding. The first WSRA grant was for \$150k. JCWCD considers the results of the 2019/2020 for which they estimated an increase of almost 4000AF measured at the North Platte River gage station to be a success. The second WSRA grant application is for \$225k basin funds to continue with additional flights over a 3-year project. The seeding target is in the SE corner of the basin between the Illinois and Michigan headwaters. It was asked if WY experienced a similar increase from their airborne seeding project. Ty replied the State of WY does not like to speak about numerical water volume results but are very satisfied that the airborne cloud seeding does increase precipitation. He observed that we are fortunate to have WY supporting us with the plane and pilot, resulting in our project only having to pay for the cost per flight (\$7-10k per flight) and seeding projectiles used. JCWCD has sent letters to other potential partners in other basins to expand the seeding project. But WY is the ultimate recipient of the additional water developed in this basin and the JCWCD will be meeting with WY to explore whether they are interested in contributing a bit more to the project. One thing that the State of CO could help us with is to provide better meteorological data in the basin to guide the deployment of cloud seeding. Barbara commented that the learning from this project will benefit the entire state and asked why this application didn't request for split funding from both basin and state accounts. Ty replied that JCWCD thought it was primarily a benefit to this basin. Barbara replied that previous presentations by CWCB to the NPBRT showed considerable interest by the state in the learning that was possible from this project. Ty explained that the JCWCD knows that a lot of folks in other basins are watching, but haven't responded to requests to partner with us. Barbara asked Russ whether the state leader on this topic (Andrew Rickman) was able to help us with the project. Given that CWCB funding for their cloud seeding program is uncertain at this time, he was unable to make any commitments. However, Russ added that there's nothing to prevent the JCWCD from asking for state match. Ty replied that Andrew has several other projects asking for funding in this program. Barbara commented that if the State of CO (and Wyoming) believes that airborne seeding has such potential, we're doing the learning for the entire state. Before Ty called for the vote, Carl asked since there are 5 RT voting members present that are also on JCWCD Board, should they recuse themselves? Barbara asked if JCWCD is getting a benefit for administrating the grant and whether that's grounds for recusal. Russ said the safest bet would be recusal. Ty called for the vote: 9 yes, 5 recusals (Ty, Pat, Rick, Carl, Randy).

9) Old business

Jim Dustin alerted the RT that the Town might be coming for assistance with enhancing the one of the wells that supplies the town.

On behalf of Owl Mountain and NRCS, Deb Heeney thanked the RT for the support of their projects.

NPBRT Meeting Minutes: 3-23-21

10) New Business-Next meeting agenda proposals

Next meeting set for Tue April 20 from 7-9pm. Ty asked Russ what needs remain for the BIP. Russ said Kara Sobieski and Matt Lindburgh will try to keep it as light a lift for the basin as possible but want to make sure they don't have anything wrong. Ty said it would have 1 hr on the agenda. Russ added that Director Mitchell is trying to get around to every roundtable and would like 10min or so.

Carl asked Russ if he could answer a question he had been asked about refresh funding of the WSRA account. He also asked what's happening with the sports betting proceeds (Prop DD) that were supposed to be funding water projects. Russ explained that WSRA funding derives from severance tax which has been dramatically reduced and there has been no update on when funds might be available to add to basin and state WSRA accounts. Starting last year, the CWCB was advising Roundtables to plan to stretch their available funds for 3 years and, to do so, to develop a strategy for approving applications. The DD funds allocation has several tiers, should be allocated by FY22 but they aren't coming to WSRA but going to water supply grants.

Someone asked how much the North Platte had remaining in their account, assuming all the applications heard today were approved for funding by the CWCB. The remainder is \$209,708. Ty mentioned that the RT has been operating with a 'first come, first serve' decision process for WSRA applications.

11) Meeting adjourned

Before the meeting was adjourned, Ty announced he plans to step down as Chair. The next meeting will include election of officers.