

NPBRT Meeting Minutes: 4-20-21

Members/Liaisons present

*Ty Wattenberg (Chair)
*Rick Wyatt
*Jim Dustin
*Coby Corkle
*Pat VanValkenberg
*Mark Hackleman
*Carl Trick
*Jimmer Baller
*Bryce Russell
*Barbara Vasquez
Aleigh Aurin (CSU Extension)

Non-RT members present

Abby Burk (Audubon Rockies,
Western Rivers Regional Program Manager)
Jim Petersen (Colorado Agriculture Alliance)

Members/Liaisons not present

*Blaine Evans
*Randy Miller
*Kari VanValkenberg
*Wade Allnutt
*Mike Allnutt
David Graf (CPW)
Paula Belcher (BLM)
Christopher Old (USFS)
Tara Wertz (USFWS)

Members/Liaisons participating remotely

Curran Trick (NPBRT rep to CWCB)

Non-RT members participating remotely

Soraya Baroumand (Div. 6 Water Comm, Dist 47)
Amy Honholz (Div. 1 Water Comm, Dist 48 & 76)
Sam Stein (CWCB)
Russ Sands (CWCB)
Michael Hein (CO Div Water Resources)
Brenna Medford (Wilson Water Group)
Kara Sobieski (Wilson Water Group)
Matt Lindburg (Brown & Caldwell)
Beth Albrecht (Brown & Caldwell)
Matt Sinclair (Jackson County Star)
Ed Millard (SW BRT)
Robert Sakata (Governor Appointee: IBCC)
Melissa Mosier (Audubon)
Coy Meyring

(*NPBRT voting members)

This meeting was held in a multimodal approach with 13 people attending physically and 15 attending remotely via zoom. Thanks to Sam Stein & for Aleigh Aurin for the support for remote participation.

1-Agenda Review

Agenda accepted with the following changes:

- Due to a schedule conflict, CWCB Director Rebecca Mitchell will not be able to participate tonight but looks forward to participating in the next meeting. Russ Sands will make a few comments on her behalf.
- Deb Heeny's presentation of completed agriculture infrastructure projects is postponed to the next meeting.

2) Review/Approval of March meeting minutes

Skipped

3) Annual Elections

Chair: Nominations from the floor for only one candidate, Ty Wattenberg, who agreed to serve. He was approved unanimously.

ViceChair: Nominations from the floor for only one candidate, Rick Wyatt, who agreed to serve. He was approved unanimously.

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Recorder: Nominations from the floor for only one candidate, Barbara Vasquez, who agreed to serve. She was approved unanimously.

4) BIP Update Presentation/Discussion

Kara Sobieski, Wilson Water Group

Kara walked us through the status of the North Platte Basin Implementation Plan update. The last time we had a presentation and discussion about the BIP update was in Sept 2020. In order to help remind us of the schedule, issues and content of the BIP draft update, I've attached Kara's Sept 2020 presentation (2020-9-21_NPBIPUpdate_BRTMaterials.pdf). It lays out the schedule, includes the existing project list, explains the tiering method for the projects, with the reminder that the results of the tiering provide a starting point for statewide competition for the limited funds for projects. The majority of the RT members, primarily due to the restrictions on meeting physically during the COVID-19 pandemic, opted to severely limit the amount of effort and time devoted to the update. Work on this update had been on the agenda for our Nov 2020 meeting which was cancelled for lack of quorum.

The Wilson Water Group slide deck that Kara presented for the update at this meeting is attached with these minutes (2021-04-20-North Platte BRT Meeting.pdf). Kara reviewed the goals and objectives carried over from the 2015 BIP. Those goals are:

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| 1. Maintain and maximize the consumptive use of water permitted in the Equitable Apportionment Decree and the baseline depletion allowance of the Three State Agreement. |
| 2. Increase economic development and diversification through strategic water use and development. |
| 3. Continue to restore, maintain, and modernize critical water infrastructure to preserve current uses and increase efficiencies. |
| 4. Maintain healthy rivers and wetlands through the strategic implementation of projects that meet prioritized non-consumptive needs. |
| 5. Describe and quantify the nonconsumptive benefits of agricultural use. |
| 6. Promote water rights protection and management through improved streamflow gaging data. |
| 7. Enhance forest health and management efforts for wildfire protection and beetle kill impacts to watershed health. |
| 8. Support the equitable statewide application of municipal water conservation. |

It was agreed that #8 would be modified to focus on local municipal water development and conservation. Rick complained about the use of the old term 'nonconsumptive' since some E&R uses like riparian corridor vegetation actually consume water. Replacement with the term E&R was discussed. Rick also brought up the topic of storage, which is not specifically called out in the Gs&Os. Sy discussed #6, the need for additional gaging, and suggested that storage be added into the language of #3, pointing out that some of the older reservoirs in the basin have outdated rating curves resulting in the calculated capacity being larger than the actual capacity.

Summary of seven additional projects which were not included on the original project list and that were proposed in the basin since fall of 2020 is also attached (NPBIP-Additional_Proposed_Projects_4-20-2021).

WWG requests the BRT members review the description, cost estimates, yield estimates, and tiering assigned to each project. BRT members can email comments or concerns on these projects directly to Brenna Mefford (brenna.mefford@wilsonwatergroup.com).

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Kara pointed out that several measurable objectives included in the previous BIP should probably be revised or removed. To simplify the effort, she suggested that measurable objectives, where applicable, be integrated into the goal and process descriptions.

Kara suggested topics for achievements since the 2015 BIP. The 3 proposed topic categories are 1) lysimeter, 2) agricultural infrastructure rehabilitation & improvements and 3) Conservation easement acreage. There was no or little discussion of 1) and 2) other than to acknowledge that the majority of the funded projects and funds spent fall into category 2. Regarding 3) Kara pointed out that the CCALT (Colorado Cattlemen’s Agricultural Land Trust) listed the conservation of over 20,000 acres in the North Platte Basin as a ‘success story’ on their website (<https://ccalt.org/success-story/north-park/>) and proposed that it would be a good E&R achievement to include in the BIP. After some heated discussion, Ty called for a vote of the RT members on whether to include the conserved acres as an achievement for the basin in the BIP update. The vote was 8 no versus 1 yes (B.V.). The discussion turned to the aerial cloud seeding work done in the basin and it was suggested this achievement replace the conserved acres. There was also some discussion about whether claims could be made for increased acreage under irrigation, with comments that it often takes years for the official reported acreage under irrigation to show an increase due in part to annual variation in available water and timing of the assessment with the current aerial method. For inclusion in the minutes, a summary of the official DWR records for North Platte Basin irrigated acreage, storage and trans-mountain diversion was provided by Erin Light after the meeting and is attached. The reference year for the North Platte Basin allowance under the 3-state agreement of 134,467 irrigated acres equivalent was recorded in 1952. Data for 2010-2020 is pasted in below:

WATER	IRRIGATED	AMOUNT	TRANSMTN
YEAR	ACREAGE	STORED	DIVERSION
	(ACRES)	(AF)	(AF)
2010	115,111	9,620	3,634
2011	116,674	6,620	641
2012	81,922	7,753	1,624
2013	105,128	17,438	5,139
2014	112,827	13,984	3,527
2015	112,944	12,454	1,368
2016	110,281	7,713	630
2017	110,975	6,422	5,130
2018	104,771	7,217	4,641
2019	112,464	14,863	6,404
2020	97,689	8,272	4227.54

The project list that is included in the BIP update material presented last Sept (attached) includes all categories: Ag, M&I and E&R. Kara and Matt Lindburg of Brown and Caldwell (general contractor for the BIP updates statewide) described the efforts undertaken at CWCB to consolidate all of the E&R data and map layers for all basins, resulting in an integrated GIS tool that was showcased in the E&R statewide meeting held on April 7 by the CWCB project lead, JoJo La. However, the basin-specific methods for identifying and mapping the key attributes

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were conserved, so there is still not a uniform approach across the basins. The Colorado Water Plan Environmental and Recreation Focus Area Map can be accessed using the link below:

<https://cwcb.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=880753ceb13d43e3bc89e2259247aafa>

The focus map created by and for the NPB for the 2015 update was based on the number and the ranking of E&R attributes identified for specific stream segments. The request for the current BIP update is to review the existing map for data gaps to ensure that key data is included. For example, some other basins have requested that wildfire burn scar layer be added to the mapping tool due to concerns about debris flow and erosion that may impact water quality as well as potential storage volume for any downstream reservoirs. Given the fires that have impacted the North Platte Basin in the past 10 years, it's something we might consider requesting. The CWCB Water Plan includes a goal to have stream management plans cover $\geq 80\%$ of locally prioritized segments in each basin. Some of the RT members expressed uncertainty or concern about SMPs, concerned that they could result in loss of control of their use of existing water rights.

With little time remaining, Kara brought us back to the timeline for the basin update and the feedback she needs for the RT members by June. With that feedback in hand, Kara plans to deliver a draft BIP Update Volume 1 to North Platte BRT members for their review in late August/early September, who will have through the end of 2021 to provide comment.

5) CWCB update

Russ Sands

Russ stepped in for Becky Mitchell who could not attend due a schedule conflict. Russ thanked the RT for work on the BIP, emphasizing how important the contributions of the RTs are to the BIPs which provide the 'heart' of the state water plan. Russ explained that Becky hoped she could attend the next NPBRT meeting. Topics she would like to cover include the Code of Conduct which was recently distributed to all RTs and the Equity Taskforce. Rick asked Russ what the Equity Taskforce was for and what kind of questions CWCB would be asking of the TF. Russ replied that the CWCB is trying to find out how to educate the general public, encourage a range of voices to provide input on water and to find ways to encourage better participation.

6) WSRF Application for \$3k Basin Funds

Jim Petersen, Colorado Ag Water Alliance

Jim briefly summarized his project for outreach, education and grant application assistance in three basins. The application is attached with these minutes (WSRF-Grant-Application-2020_final.doc). He explained he is requesting \$3k basin fund support from the North Platte Basin, \$4.5k from the Gunnison Basin and \$7K from the South Platte Basin plus a state match of \$14.5k.

Education: A combination of presentations, mini-workshops, webinars, and exhibit booths. The focus will be Watershed Management (WMP), Stream Management Plans (SMP), Regulation 85, infrastructure improvements, and pasture management. CAWA will be conducting outreach with conservancy districts, conservation districts, members organizations of the Colorado Ag Water Alliance, Irrigation Districts, and ditch companies.

Grant Application Assistance: CAWA will provide support to agricultural producers and

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organizations in preparing applications for state and federal grants related to projects that deal with infrastructure, stream management, water quality, and conservation.

CAWA will host nine (8) trainings or mini-workshops that will cover the following issues: funding for infrastructure projects, Reg 85 and water quality, pasture management, and stream and watershed management plans. There will be one (1) meeting in the North Platte Basin, two (2) meetings in the Gunnison Basin, and five (5) meetings in the South Platte Basin.

Following Jim's comments on water quality and N runoff, Carl Trick noted that he and Silver Spur had been approached by three grad students (2 from Univ of Wy, 1 from CSU) who wanted to study the nitrogen dynamics in high mountain hay. Their hypothesis is that N gets trapped in the thatch and may not make it down into the soil for use by the plants. He agreed to provide contact info to Jim in the spirit of minimizing duplication of effort.

Following Jim's presentation, Ty asked whether this project would provide grant writing support for the basin. Jim replied yes. Barbara asked what capacity existed currently in the Alliance and Jim replied that at this time, he was the only person available but that if this grant was funded, he hoped to bring on some part-time grant writing resources.

Ty called for a voice vote of RT members who voted 8 yes to 1 no (RW) to support this grant application. Ty asked Rick for the reason for his no vote. He explained he was against any use of EPA funds on water quality issues.

5) Water Economic Study

Abby Burk, Western Rivers Regional Program Manager, Audubon Rockies

Abby introduced herself and her role with Audubon and the work she has been doing to support the development of the BIPs and the State Water Plan. A pdf of her powerpoint "Colorado Thrives when our rivers do- The value of our Hardworking Rivers" is attached.

Her first statistics elicited surprise from some RT members:

"In Colorado, an estimated >80% of our state's 800 species of birds, fish and wildlife depend on riparian habitat, even though these areas comprise less than 2% of our state."

Audubon is part of an alliance called Water for Colorado, a diverse group of organizations including Business for Water Stewardship, Trout Unlimited, American Rivers, Conservation Colorado, The Nature Conservancy. Business for Water Stewardship conducted a survey that was published in Mar 2020 designed to estimate the economic benefits to the state of water-related recreation. They found that birds, wildlife and recreation contributed \$10.3B. & 131,000 jobs to the state's economy. And the demographics suggest that Colorado's population could increase to 8.5M by 2050, an increase of more than 50% from 2015. The results of the survey have received a lot of attention in the press. They were broken down by basin and the results for the North Platte Basin have triggered some envy from other basins! The survey estimated water-related recreation resulted in \$983M economic impact. RT members expressed some skepticism about that number and suggested that much of that money may have been spent out-of-county. Barbara asked Coby if there was a way to test this against county tax revenue and he said he'd look into it. Abby's presentation included a link to the study

<https://businessforwater.org/co-rivers-key-to-economy>

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and here is the link for the specific North Platte results:

https://businessforwater.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SA_BWS_FactSheet_Digital_NP_1PG.pdf

This page shows the breakdown of the estimated number of people who participated in the different categories of water-related recreation in the North Platte Basin



For those who want to dig deeper, Abby's presentation provides contact info for Molly Mugglestone, Business for Water Stewardship (molly@businessforwater.org).

Abby turned next to the Colorado Water Plan and to the new CWCB GIS tool for E&R focus areas. She reinforced Matt Lindburg's earlier comments about the need to address any basin-level data gaps and spoke to the value other basins have found in developing stream management plans.

7) Old business

If the WSRF application by Colorado Agriculture Alliance for \$3k is approved by CWCB for funding, the remainder in the NPBRT basin fund account will be \$206,708

8) New Business-Next meeting agenda proposals

Next meeting set for **Monday** May 17 from 7-9pm at the Wattenberg Center

9) Meeting adjourned