



Inter Basin Compact Committee Basin Roundtables
Rio Grande Basin Roundtable

Tuesday, June 9, 2020 at 2:00 pm
GoTo Meeting Online

Meeting Minutes

Chairman called the meeting to order at 2:02 pm.

Introductions of those attending on GoToMeeting and those attending by phone: Nathan Coombs, Emma Reesor, Daniel Boyes, Brenda Felmler, Rio de la Vista, Peter Barkmann, Bethany Howell, Cindy Medina, Cleave Simpson, Dale Pizel, Cathy Garcia, Jill Lucero, Jim Ehrlich, Kyle Balint, Russ Sands, Sophia Sigstedt, Steven Romero, Travis Smith, Kathryn Weismiller, Heather Dutton, Adam Moore, Craig Cotten, Virginia Christensen, Judy Lopez, Keith Holland, Abby Werner, Sam Stein, Sheldon Rockey, Chuck Finnegan, Mike Gibson, Jeff Deems, Megan Colwell, Dwight Martin, Heather Greenwolf, Erin Minks, Hannah Thill, Daryl Kohut, Ronda Lobato, Ryan Unterreiner, Chuck Finnegan, Christi Bode.

Public Comment

Rio de la Vista informed the Roundtable that she is still moving forward with the Basin Symposium hosted by the Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center. The details are still being worked out, but it will likely be hosted online and the keynote speaker has been confirmed. Look for an announcement from Rio about the symposium.

Emma Reesor reminded those attending about GoToMeeting features regarding cameras, mute, etc. Some discussion regarding format. Attendees were asked to put all comments and questions in the chat.

PEPO Report

Bethany Howell gave an update on completed PEPO projects and participation in state meetings in the past year. Quarterly newsletters and website updates were completed periodically, the radar and recreation videos with Moxiecran Media were completed, and Bethany attended 3 in person PEPO meetings with representatives from other basins. Bethany updated the Basin Education Action Plan (EAP) in March, which is a yearly requirement from all basins. The EAP for 2020-2021 will include potential opportunities for community engagement events, continued newsletters and website updates, news articles, progress of at least 2 more videos, and creating a podcast. Bethany is also involved in the BIP process on the Education & Outreach subcommittee and participates as much as possible in the other subcommittees to facilitate the Rio Grande BIP process with the public. Those who are interested in participating in the Education Subcommittee are welcome, meetings are still virtual and on an as needed basis.

WSRF Funding Preview - Conejos River Partnership Project: Phase 1

Emma Reesor, executive director of the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project, explained the genesis of the Conejos River Partnership Project through work identified through the Stream Management Plan. Benefits identified include improved function and reduced maintenance of infrastructure on the Conejos River, riparian restoration surrounding diversion structures, improving aquatic habitat connectivity. Supports hydrologic connectivity to South Branch of the Conejos River.

Results from the Stream Management Plan identify areas of high need and channel instability and geomorphic challenges. This project will focus on those areas. Project includes replacing diversion infrastructure on 5 ditches – the New JB Romero Ditch, North Eastern Ditch, Sabine School Section Ditch, Elledges Ditch, and Fuerticitos Ditch - on the Conejos River, removing and replacing diversions that are currently fish barriers. Colorado Parks and Wildlife is also involved in the capacity of identifying fish habitat needs as well as Colorado Division of Water Resources for water administration.

Structures were rated for headgates and diversion with associated streambank condition by Daniel Boyes, SMP Project Manager. All ditches selected had lower ratings for either streambank condition or head gate structure.

Project includes replacing aging diversion dams and headgates with diversion structures that are fish passable and stabilizing streambanks and restoring riparian habitat surrounding each diversion. The project meets multiple goals in the Basin Implementation Plan and Colorado Water Plan, including collaboration with diverse stakeholders, addressing multiple water needs/gaps, and leveraging with matching funds.

Total Project Cost: \$627,000 WSRF Request: \$250,000

Reesor completed her presentation and opened the floor for questions and comments.

Mike Gibson asked about the role of Robins Construction in the project. Reesor responded that the construction company has an engineer who is very familiar with the project area and Riverbend Engineering is collaborating with Robins' in creating their design. Gibson cautioned against conflict of interest as a comment. Keith Holland asked about total number of shareholders helped by this project. Nathan Coombs responded that there were about 220, 4, 2, and 5-6 on each ditch listed. Cindy Medina asked if the Roundtable had sufficient funds for this request. Coombs noted that currently we do, but circumstances may change with the funding situation in the future. The project partners felt their collaboration was strong enough to merit an application. Heather Dutton and Russ Sands discussed how understanding the upcoming CWCB budget would help clarify this discussion.

Dutton explained that a letter was sent out that day from CWCB director Becky Mitchell about the budget situation. The director of DNR has directed CWCB to stop funding on any new projects, including those approved at the March meeting. Russ Sands added information regarding the uncertainty of approving funds that are affected by severance tax funds. There will be a zero distribution in the next fiscal year, and potentially into the future. Cindy Medina commented that there is so much energy that goes into project planning and with the grim circumstances, should we as a board want to encourage new project applications knowing the funding reality.

Sands responded that the existing money in the Basin accounts are not at risk, but they are not sure if they will be allowed to move forward, depending on what the legislature approves and what is available.

Travis Smith agreed that we should move forward in the areas where we can and requested that the RESTORE grant be discussed in regards to the Conejos River project.

Reesor discussed the RESTORE grant and that they are in the contracting phase for design and work later in the summer.

Nathan noted that the Conejos Water Conservancy District Board wanted to partner with RGHRP and were enthusiastic in collaborating and decided to move forward even with the uncertainty of the water funding as an example of how to make projects happen across boundaries. Cindy explained that she thinks the project is beneficial and supports it but isn't sure about continuing to vet new projects with the uncertainty of funding. Reesor and Coombs agreed that knowing more by next month would be helpful for clarity and answers and understanding how to proceed with new projects.

Dwight Martin commented that projects should at least continue to be vetted to see what is viable and not stop completely as these projects are still needed. Steven Romero agreed with Dwight, adding that it would give us momentum. Judy Lopez also agreed that we create a queue of projects. Virginia Christensen suggested giving new applicants a memo or note explaining the current climate of funding so that they would know what the CWCB is dealing with, but still continue to accept new projects. Cleave Simpson also agreed that applicants should be aware of what funding looks like and noted that the executive committee and Roundtable are going to have to prioritize projects, knowing that applicants may not receive funding for all projects. Heather Dutton asked about the potential for prioritizing projects in the next few months and that we should think about structuring priorities for a larger discussion with time for thought so that we can create methods moving forward.

Emma Reesor noted that the Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) Update process is underway and now is a good time to update project lists and have these conversations at the same time. Nathan agreed with the thoughts expressed and requested that the project be examined at the July meeting and continue to move forward and asked for any opposition to that plan. No one opposed, so general consent is to allow the Conejos River Partnership Project application to continue moving forward, with a full funding request at the July Roundtable meeting. This holds for any potential projects that are brought to the Roundtable.

BIP Update

Daniel Boyes with the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project gave an update on the progression of the BIP Update in the Rio Grande Basin. Discussed the work plan with goals and methods, the consistent framework with using Local Experts and Subject Matter Experts. Actions include updating the project list, viewing and evaluating the technical update results, developing update documents, facilitating and administrating local BIP update. Understanding gaps in the technical information and updates to prioritize projects will be important for the Local Expert to work through with all the subcommittees. Potential additional studies include existing reservoir storage capacity and new opportunities for storage in the basin, incorporating new and existing groundwater data into RGDSS, forest health assessment working cross-basin, and improving M&I data for technical update modeling. Boyes explained the two volumes that the state is creating: Vol. 1 is a strategy document which focuses on the overview of the

projects and action, and volume 2 is evergreen content based. Multiple meetings will still be held in the upcoming months as the BIP process is scheduled for completion in 2021.

For more information regarding the BIP update, there is an updated document and process on the RGBRT website. Questions and comments should be directed to Daniel.

IBCC Report

Cleave Simpson reported that the IBCC has not met since the first week of March and not much activity at that meeting. There is another meeting scheduled for next week on the 17th. Keith Holland and Ann Bunting did not have any more information to add.

Subdistrict Report

Simpson noted that 1, 2, & 3 are fully operational and making annual replacement plan contributions to their particular areas. Subdistricts 4 & 5 submitted plans of water management which were approved by the state engineer. There were no objections and now the district board will review the plans of water management in a hearing to consider adoption. This happened on May 28, with some comments submitted but no formal objections. The ten day window to file in court has expired. June numbers for the aquifer are not available yet, but numbers for the previous months indicate a downward slide in the unconfined aquifer. All subdistricts must be operational by March 15, 2021.

Division of Water Resources Update

Craig Cotten discussed that snowpack summary for RG Basin is gone, despite peaking at 99% of the long-term average. Which means it is gone about a month earlier than the average year. Some rain from the preceding week, gave other ditches the ability to divert, but most rivers and streams have peaked and are now declining. Streamflow data on almost all stream gauges is well below average.

- Rio Grande at Del Norte - 65% of average, 425,000 AF, 25% owed to downstream states.
- Conejos River - 175,000 AF, 58% of long term average, owe 19% to downstream states, 0% curtailment on the system.

Precipitation for the next few months is predicted to be lower than average. Cotton explained that the local office remains closed and will be closed through Labor Day - per Governor's orders. Staff are still working from home primarily, although some staff are in working in the office, they continue to practice social distancing and the office is closed to the public.

CWCB Update

Sam Stein spoke to the BIP process and all basins being on track for targets in June and July. The Listening Sessions for public comment have been going well. Comments and questions that weren't addressed in the session will be addressed online. Two more are scheduled for the 10th and 11th.

Sam is happy to facilitate conversations regarding grants and discuss concerns. Drought monitoring continues and was dry particularly in the Arkansas and SLV. June 23rd at 9:30 am will be the drought task meeting for those wanting to know more about that process headed into summer.

The IBCC meeting will be held virtually on June 17th. The CWCB Board will meet in July virtually to discuss demand management among other topics. Russ Sands noted that DNR and CWCB staff will also work from home through Labor Day per state orders. Speaking to the budget again, Sands thought the CWCB should be on track for Water Plan grants, they may just be delayed. There is opportunity as Emma noted

to support projects with better data. Sands noted that they did get extra funding to support the BIP process rather than have BIP funds come out of the Basin accounts.

There was brief discussion of the current Renewable Water Resources ad – question from Ronda Lobato about discrediting their advertising. Bethany Howell noted that she had flagged the ad as misleading/scam, and Facebook said it was taken down, but others noted that there are other ads still floating around.

Nathan Coombs adjourned the meeting at 3:50 pm after noting that unless the executive order is lifted, we will still meet online for the July 2020 meeting per state restrictions.