

SUMMER 2021
VOL. 5 ISSUE 2

RIO GRANDE BASIN ROUNDTABLE NEWSLETTER



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WELCOME!

For more information on the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable, visit www.rgbrt.org

NEXT ROUNDTABLE MEETING: JULY 13, 2021 @ 2 PM

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the next Rio Grande Basin Roundtable meeting will be held virtually as of this publication. Community members are welcome to “attend” either on the phone or by computer. The agenda is available online at www.rgbrt.org. All comments and questions during the meeting should be directed to the facilitator through the “Chat” function to help us avoid confusion and extra noise. Attendees are also encouraged to keep microphones muted to prevent background noise. Please check the website www.rgbrt.org and our Facebook page for meeting links and information as the format has changed from Go To Meeting to Zoom or in the case of in person meeting approval.

BASIN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN UPDATE

The Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) for the Rio Grande Basin is still in its draft form, according to Daniel Boyes of the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project and Local Expert for the Basin. Boyes, along with Emma Reesor, the RGHRP Executive Director, have been diligently compiling data and feedback from the five subcommittees on Education & Outreach, Environment & Recreation, Agriculture, Municipal & Industrial, and Water Administration. The final draft is due to the Colorado Water Conservation Board staff for review at the end of June. Afterwards, a public review period will be held, with a final version targeted for release in January 2022. The draft is comprised of Volume 1, which is newly updated projects and data, including updated Basin goals, and Volume 2, which contains “evergreen” information regarding the overall history and major themes of the Rio Grande Basin. The draft will be released for review by the Roundtable membership before availability to the general public. Many thanks to those who participated in the subcommittee process which helped to identify projects and priorities for each of the key areas.



FINDING BALANCE: AG &

WATER

Check out and share the latest video addressing water use & sustainability by Moxiecran Media, in partnership with the Roundtable and Colorado Potato Administrative Committee!
<https://vimeo.com/520154017>

CHECK OUT THE TIMELINE OF THE BIP, UPDATED BASIN GOALS, PROJECTS TIERING MATRIX, AND OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE BASIN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN AT WWW.RGBRT.ORG/RGBIP-UPDATE/. PG. 1

ROUNDTABLE MEMBERS RECEIVE RECOGNITION

Every Roundtable member does amazing work on behalf of our community, and now three members are being recognized for their ingenuity, collaboration, and implementation of beneficial projects. Nathan Coombs, manager of the Conejos Water Conservancy District, and Kevin Terry, Trout Unlimited staff, will receive the David Getches Flowing Water Award for 2021 in recognition of their work on the Conejos River Winter Flow Program.

This program offers incentives to surface water rights holders who choose to release water during the winter months, increasing flows which are usually extremely low and therefore detrimental to fish and wildlife health. Through creativity and dedication, Nathan and Kevin created a program which benefits everyone involved and utilizes a flexible perspective on water rights administration. Nathan, who in addition to his duties as Roundtable Chairman and Water Conservancy District manager, also owns and runs his family farm in Conejos County. Kevin, a fish biologist as well as the Recreation representative for the Roundtable, spends as much time as possible fishing on the Rio Grande.

Cindy Medina of Alamosa River Keepers, has been highlighted as a Woman of Color in the Colorado Water Trust's Diversity and Inclusion in the Water World blog. You can check out Cindy's interview on their website at www.coloradowatertrust.org.



Nathan Coombs and Kevin Terry discuss the Winter Flow Program on the banks of the Conejos River. Photo Credit: Susan Moran, WeCO

Cindy Medina gave her perspective on navigating multiple water identities in her Colorado Water Trust interview.



ROUNDTABLE MEMBER HIGHLIGHT

We are proud of our Roundtable members. They are community members with an investment in water use, conservation, and beneficial projects. We feature a member in each issue so that our community can get to know us a little better. You can find a complete list of members at www.rgbrt.org.

CINDY MEDINA - ALAMOSA RIVER MEMBER AT LARGE



Cindy oversees the Alamosa River watershed in central Colorado that remains a United States Superfund site as a result of heavy metals and cyanide leaking into the river. Her organization, the Alamosa Riverkeepers, helped initiate an instream flow right in the Alamosa River.

As part of the Alamosa Riverkeeper organization, Cindy received the David Getches Flowing Waters Award for improving environmental water resources and recreational values in the Alamosa River. Her efforts in collaboration, innovation and inspiration continue not just on the project but also in her Roundtable duties.

STATE OF THE BASIN SYMPOSIUM EXAMINES WATER ISSUES

Source Credit: Lisa Cyriacks of the Crestone Eagle, Edited by Bethany Howell

Craig Cotten, Division 3 Engineer, Colorado Division of Water Resources, started off the symposium hosted by the Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center at Adams State University on March 20 with a brief update on the current state of the Rio Grande Basin and some forecasts for 2021. After the most recent snowstorms, snowpack in major drainages in Colorado now ranges from 105% in the Upper Rio Grande Basin to just 82% in the combined San Miguel/Dolores/Animas/San Juan basins. Statewide the snow water equivalent is at 92% of average.

Cotten was quick to caution everyone that while this is an optimistic note, stream flows in the basin remain below average. The immediate forecast for March through May 2021 is for above average temperatures and below average precipitation. Neither are the best news for water users. Water scarcity, exportation threats and aquifer depletion were the topics of the day, as well as working toward sustainable practices to meet the challenges of an over-appropriated water system.

Water management has always been a challenge in this arid region. In the past communities across the San Luis Valley recognized these threats and worked together to protect the water. Dan Birch of the Consensus Building Institute led an interactive session with attendees underlining the importance of the connections we make with each other. The San Luis Valley has a history of rallying to address water threats. Given the potential of another water export plan, the valley needs to rally together again. Panelists for the discussion included Representative Jeni Arndt, Colorado State House; George Whitten, San Juan Ranch, Saguache; James Henderson, 711 Ranch, La Jara; Kelsea MacIlroy, CSU; and Armando Valdez, Valdez Land & Livestock, Capulin. They shared viewpoints and discussed the challenges of water use in the valley.

In addition to water scarcity, aquifer depletion, and exportation threats, panelists touched upon the uncertain future for agricultural water users and the economic component of water. Water rights are also property rights and an emphasis on self-determination was evident in panelists' comments. Panelists agreed that connections with each other are important. We need to help each other understand the problems we are facing and problem-solve together.

Ken Salazar, former Secretary of the Interior and Co-Founder of the Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center at Adams State University, called to mind the history of the valley facing export threats and solutions found over the years to continue to protect the water through legislation and conservation. In introducing the keynote speaker he called on attendees to focus on their love of the Rio Grande, lifeblood of water in the valley, when facing the challenges ahead.

Dan Gibbs, Executive Director of Colorado's Department of Natural Resources, tied together an overview of statewide initiatives in water and forest health, the importance of conservation for outdoor recreation, as well as agricultural communities. They seek to improve the situation for all water users here in the San Luis Valley.

The symposium built on a deep history of innovation and water sharing, leaders, new and established, working to shepherd the culture and communities of the valley into a sustainable relationship with water. Weaving together challenges like climate change, growing pressure to the water supply, and renewed water exports with love for land and water and the desire to care for it. *Continued on Page 4*

The San Luis Valley has a history of sustainable water practices, connecting culture and the communities of the Valley. Working together, sharing a sense of place, is the path forward to ensure our collective future. Rio de la Vista, Director of the Salazar Rio Grande Del Norte Center closed the symposium saying, "The conversation will continue."

The Salazar Center works to engage and advance education and the conservation of land and water along with the rich historic and cultural attributes at the headwaters of the Rio Grande.

EDUCATION UPDATES



Youth Conservation Camp at Beaver Creek included partners like SLV Trout Unlimited, who offered activities related to wildlife, forestry, outdoor skills, range science, and water & soil topics.



The Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project, Adams State University's Outdoor Stewardship Program, and RGWCEI took college students to the Riparian Park for vegetation planting.

Education & Outreach have always been important to the Rio Grande Basin. A large part of the Basin Implementation Process involved finding ways for each key topic area to include education, outreach, and engagement within their priorities.

From community wide efforts such as the State of the Basin Symposium and the virtual Water Leaders 2.0 offered monthly throughout the spring to previous Water Leader graduates, to the K-college efforts through Adams State University, the Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education Initiative, and all the partners who help facilitate these programs (too many to list!) - the Rio Grande Basin is dedicated to identifying and communicating important water topics.

Roundtable members are encouraged to participate on the education subcommittee, and ideas & suggestions are always welcome.



Nathan Coombs of the Conejos Water Conservancy District plays a water administration game with Centauri Middle School sixth graders at RGWCEI's mobile water festival.

<p>CWCB Board of Directors Meeting July 21 & 22</p>	<p>Agricultural Drought Tell your story about the impact of drought on your crops and livestock at engagecwcb.org</p>
<p>Water Equity Task Force A fall equity workshop will be hosted by CWCB. The first Task Force Meeting is available to see via recording at engagecwcb.org</p>	<p>PEPO Meeting August 24 at CO Water Congress Conference Time TBD</p>

CPW AWARDS WETLAND GRANT FUNDING TO SLV PROJECTS

Three applications to the Colorado Parks & Wildlife’s Colorado Wetland Program funding pool were recently approved, enabling much needed work to proceed on behalf of SLV wetland areas. The applications included funding for work at Rock Creek, McIntire Springs, and approval for an application by the National Wildlife Refuges. To learn more about the work benefiting wetlands in the Rio Grande Basin, contact Cary Aloia, SLV Wetland FAC chair at Cary_Aloia@msn.com.

SUMMER IS HEATING UP - RECREATE RESPONSIBLY!

The Rio Grande National Forest needs our help to minimize the risks of wildfire as our soil & grasses begin to dry in this hot weather. Please remember to:

- USE EXISTING FIRE RINGS OR A CAMP STOVE**
- NEVER LEAVE YOUR CAMPFIRE UNATTENDED**
- DROWN, STIR, & DEAD OUT ASHES BEFORE YOU LEAVE!**

ATTORNEY GENERAL VISITS SLV

On Tuesday, June 8, Attorney General Phil Weiser gave a talk and attended a reception at the Cattails golf course, answering questions regarding water infrastructure funding, the proposed water export scheme by Renewable Water Resources, and the use of water rights in a changing world. AG Weiser took an unequivocal stand on inter-basin transfer of water. “Water in the San Luis Valley needs to stay in the San Luis Valley.” Describing water infrastructure as a “broad term”, Weiser mentioned priorities such as water protection, smart storage and “resilience”, a term also frequently used by Governor Polis and Senator Bennet in discussions of addressing the challenges of climate change.

*Source Credit: Alamosa Valley Courier
Photo Credit: Priscilla Waggoner*



Like what you’re reading? Sign up for future editions of the RGBRT Newsletter at info@riograndeheadwaters.org

Want to share news about your water projects, organizations, or events? Email your information to Bethany Howell, Public Education Participation & Outreach Liaison at bethany@rgwcei.org

We’re also happy to share statewide initiatives, events, and other water-centric programs. **PG. 5**

