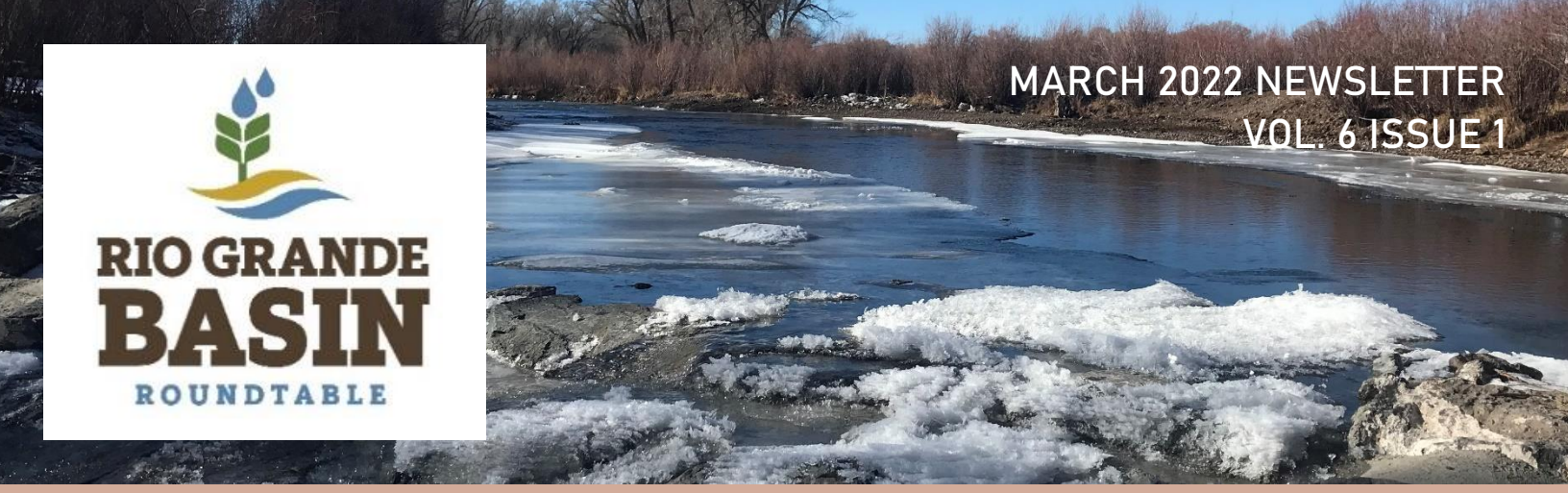

RIO GRANDE BASIN ROUNDTABLE

MARCH 2022 NEWSLETTER
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Table of Contents

WELCOME!

The RGBRT fosters cooperation in Colorado's Rio Grande Basin through support of multi-purpose projects that help us manage, protect, and sustain water use today and into the future. The Roundtable exists to make stuff happen! Check out our website: http://rgbrt.org/

The RGBRT Supports Water 2022 Rio Grande Style! *By Judy Lopez*

On January 26th Governor Jared Polis launched the Water 2022 initiative. The statewide initiative is a year-long project that serves as a call to action for all Coloradans to take an active role in ensuring that Colorado's water future is secure and sustainable. The current campaign comes on the ten-year heels of Water 2012. The 2012 campaign was a celebration of water and the many roles that it plays in all our lives. The Water '22 campaign was created to educate Coloradans about how the state's water is one of its most important resources and to encourage conservation to mitigate the impacts of climate change, which has which had led to persistent drought conditions. The Rio Grande Basin Roundtable will be working with Water Education Colorado (WeCO) to support the initiative. We will be doing 22 monthly articles that will share Rio Grande Basin water information as well as how that same concept works in other basins.

2022 is a milestone year for water in Colorado. It is the 100th anniversary of the Colorado River Compact; the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act; the 20th anniversary of Water Education Colorado; and the year when the 2015 Colorado Water Plan will be updated to continue our long history of ensuring high quality water to support our state's wide range of water uses and values. The Rio Grande Basin Roundtable also wants to give a shout out to local entities who have championed water. If you're a ditch/reservoir company, ag partner, a fishing organization, skiing or recreation group, conservancy or conservation district, environmental group or local agency we would love to share your good work with the community!

Continued on page 4.

FOR THE LATEST IN WATER 22 NEWS, VISIT https://water22.org/

Valley Efforts Aim for Better Snowpack Picture and Refined Streamflow Forecasting *By Matt Hildner*


Photo Credit: Heather Dutton

San Luis Valley water officials have spent over a decade building on past work to measure snowpack and refine streamflow forecasting. During that span, they've added more measuring devices, a new Doppler radar for the region, and the incorporation of an additional stream forecasting model. The aim of those efforts, which are ongoing, is to improve the accuracy of predicting Rio Grande Compact Delivery requirements.

While accurate streamflow forecasts matter across regions for a variety of reasons, the nature of the Compact gives them added importance in Colorado.

The state has an annual delivery obligation under the Compact that varies according to the yield of streamflows. In wet years, Colorado is required to send more water down the Rio Grande and the Conejos River and its tributaries to New Mexico. In dry years, the state keeps a greater share of the flows.

If forecasts overestimate a wet year and the Colorado Division of Water Resources sets a large curtailment on surface water diversions, irrigators are left watching runoff surge past their headgates during early season high flows. Conversely, if forecasts underestimate flows, water users are curtailed late in the season when water is already limited.

Division Engineer Craig Cotten said his office traditionally used streamflow forecasts from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the National Weather Service. He suspects factors such as fire and beetle kill have impacted the accuracy of the forecasts over the last 15 years.

Since 2001, bark beetles and wildfire have combined to kill hundreds of thousands of acres of trees, especially in the high-elevation parts of the basin that accumulate the largest snowpack.

The effort to diversify the forecasts available to DWR led Valley water officials to the Weather Research and Forecasting Model-Hydrological (WRF-Hydro). Scientists at the National Center for Atmospheric Research hatched the model in 2002. Rio Grande Basin Roundtable Chair Nathan Coombs said the late Joe Busto, a researcher at the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB), helped link valley officials to the scientists who run WRF-Hydro.

Coombs, who also manages the Conejos Water Conservancy District, said the model has the ability to take in a greater range of factors that might influence snowpack and, hence, streamflow. "WRF-Hydro contemplates beetle kill, soil moisture, fires — all of that," he said.

Cotten said if all three forecasts vary widely, settling on one streamflow figure to meet delivery requirements is difficult. If two of the forecasts align and one remains an outlier, his office goes with the former.

"That's been helpful to have different viewpoints, he said.

Local water managers have also worked to increase the data available to forecasting models.

Prior to 2015, local snowpack had been measured by the 17 Snow Telemetry snow gauges, known as SNOTEL sites, and nine snow courses where NRCS and DWR officials take and record measurements by hand.

By 2015, the CWCD and Coombs had added six snow gauges and five stream gauges to increase the local data available to WRF-Hydro.

The CWCD, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District and the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District (SLVWCD) then pushed to add radar to the region. Previously, the basin had been covered by radars in Pueblo and Grand Junction.

With catalyzing support from CWCB and added funding from Alamosa County and the Colorado Department of Transportation, both of which wanted the radar for travel management, the $1.1 million radar was installed in 2019. The data from the new radar is used by both the National Weather Service and scientists working on the WRF-Hydro model.

SLVWCD Manager Heather Dutton said the new radar, which sits at San Luis Valley Regional Airport, provides a fuller picture of storms, especially up the Conejos drainage and the low-laying country in the Rio Grande mainstem. "The radar has helped immensely because it allows us to fill in the holes between the SNOTELs, the snow courses, and the added SNOWLITEs," she said.

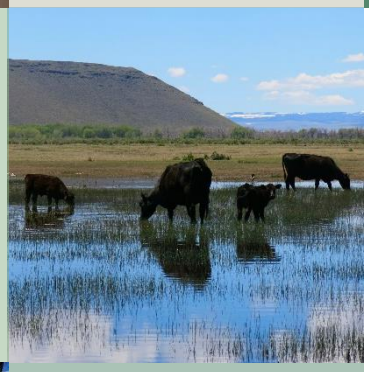
Efforts to increase the types and amount of data and forecasting accuracy are not limited to local action. Cotten said he just met forecasters and water managers from outside the state, and he's hopeful it could lead to enhanced forecasting for the entire Rio Grande Basin. *Continued on Page 4.*

Renewable Water Resources Proposal Threatens Valley Communities, Economies, and Wildlife

By RGBRT

RWR proposes to export 22,000 acre-feet to communities on the Front Range.
Photo Credit: Heather Dutton

This proposal would have harmful impacts on the agriculture, recreational opportunities, and environment in the SLV.
Photo Credit: Rio de la Vista



Fill out this Google Form to order a #StopWaterExport shirt.
Photo Credit: John Reesor

Send emails or letters to the Douglas County Commissioners and Denver press. Their addresses, along with message suggestions, can be found here.

Renewable Water Resources (RWR) has put forth a proposal to export groundwater from the San Luis Valley (SLV) to meet growing municipal demands in Colorado's Front Range communities. Most recently, RWR submitted a proposal and request that Douglas County use up to $20 million of the county's COVID-relief funds to support their SLV water export plan. RWR's proposal includes establishing a well field in the northeast area of the SLV to pump 22,000 acre-feet each year out of the confined aquifer. RWR plans to retire 34,000 acre-feet by buying water rights belonging to farmers and ranchers and establish a $50 million Community Fund for the SLV.

This proposal would have significant impacts on the economy and rural communities of the SLV. There is no water to spare in the SLV; farmers are already voluntarily reducing water use to reach sustainable aquifer levels. This proposal would dry up at least 23,000 acres of farms and ranches, which would result in an annual loss of $53 million from the agriculture economy alone. In addition, the loss of groundwater in the basin would have adverse effects on recreational opportunities and the environment. Water bodies adjacent to the proposed well field, including streams and wetlands at the Great Sand Dunes National Park, would be negatively impacted. This would not only harm the nearly half a billion dollar water-based recreation economy, but would strain the native wildlife that depend on healthy wetlands and streams, including native fish, elk, and sandhill cranes. For these reasons, the RGBRT unanimously voted to take an official stance of opposition against the RWR proposal on March 8th, 2022.

Douglas County Commissioners Laydon, Teal, and Thomas planned to visit the SLV on March 26, 2022 to view the RWR property, visit an irrigated farm, and hold a meeting with SLV elected officials followed by a community meeting at the Ski-Hi center in Monte Vista. On the morning of March 8th, they decided to cancel the community meeting, citing that the meeting would not allow for effective dialogue due to the large "circus"-like opposition.

While it is disappointing for SLV citizens to lose the opportunity to voice their opinions, there are still ways to make your voice heard. Take action by talking to people in the Front Range community, writing letters to Douglas County Commissioners, and submitting opinion letters to Denver media. Up-to-date information on this proposal can be found at www.protectsanluisvalleywater.com.

For more information and resources, visit
www.protectsanluisvalleywater.com

PROTECT OUR WATER

Continued from page 1: The RGBRT Supports Water 22 Rio Grande Style

We will be sharing this information through Facebook posts, encouraging participation in the book club and speaker bureau, holding a Water 2022 basin tour, working with local breweries to create a Water 22 beer, and hosting events to get San Luis Valley residents to engage with water on their terms. As we begin this initiative, we want to hear from you! Is it hiking, fishing, float, painting, or photography trips? If you have an idea or would be willing to share your time and talents or organizational information, please email us at info.rgbrt@gmail.com.

Water '22 is a year-long celebration of Colorado's water, dedicated to the idea that "It all starts here." It's about Coloradans from all corners of the state, and all walks of life, recognizing the value of water, and growing in understanding of how water connects all people, upstream and downstream, past, present and future. It's about coming together as a statewide community to collectively act, in order to make sure our water can meet all of the needs of today and for future generations.

This article was brought to you by the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable. The roundtable meets the second Tuesday of the month. If we are in-person, we are meeting at the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, 8805 Independence Way, Alamosa, CO 81101. Due to Covid restrictions we are also offering a Zoom option. We welcome your attendance and encourage checking the Roundtable website at www.rgbrt.org prior to the meeting to see if an in-person option is available.

Rio Grande Spring Runoff 2019. Photo Credit: Heather Dutton

Continued from page 2: Valley Snowpack Picture

In November, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation submitted a report to Congress focused on new snow-measurement technologies that could be deployed over the next five years. The report noted new technologies can aide better water supply forecasts, spur research and development and, in some instances, be used directly by water managers.

In the meantime, water managers in the Valley are looking to increase coverage and density of snowpack measurement data.

The Conejos and SLV conservancy districts plan to add six to eight more SNOLITE gauges, depending on construction costs. While specific sites still need to be nailed down, the south end of the Conejos drainage, the upper Saguache Creek drainage, and areas in the upper Rio Grande above Rio Grande Reservoir and near Snow Mesa are all candidates.

Lastly, water officials across the state are looking for funding for statewide Light Detection and Ranging flights. LiDAR, as the technology is known, uses lasers to measure the topography from the air in the dry season and to provide a snapshot of snowpack during a subsequent winter or spring flight.

"We need everything," Dutton said. "I don't think that LIDAR is a silver bullet since it only shows snowpack at a point in time, but it's part of the picture."

Roundtable Member Highlight:

Keith Holland

Agriculture and Reservoirs Member at Large

Keith Holland is President of the Santa Maria Reservoir Company. He is an At Large Member of the Roundtable for Agriculture/ Reservoirs. Keith is a farmer and he was recently named the IBCC Representative for the Rio Grande Basin.

Rio Grande BIP Update Complete!

The update to the 2015 Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) is now complete! Volumes I and II of the Rio Grande BIP are available here.

Thank you to all who contributed to this effort! Please fill out the survey below to share your experience with the update process to improve future BIP updates!
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6VFB6Y8

Upcoming Events:

Photo Credit: Erin McWilliams

Apr. 12

The April RGBRT meeting will be held at the Rio Grande Water Conservation District Office, located at 8805 Independence Way in Alamosa, from 2-4PM, with an Executive Committee meeting starting at 1PM. The Education Committee will meet at 11AM at the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District Office, located at 623 4th St. in Alamosa. A Zoom link will be listed on the Roundtable website for each of these meetings if you'd like to join virtually!

May 6

The Rio Grande Compact Commission Meeting will be held on May 6. Stay tuned for more details!

May 21

The 10th annual Congreso de Acequias will be held at Centennial School in San Luis. This event is free with lunch included; all irrigators and their families are invited to attend! Stay tuned for more information!

Want to stay up to date? Subscribe to our newsletter at info.rgbrt@gmail.com and follow us on our Facebook Page!

We're also happy to share statewide initiatives, events, and other water-centric programs on our Facebook Page, website calendar, and in this newsletter! Email info.rgbrt@gmail.com with content you wish to share!
Check our website calendar for content submission deadlines.