

Photo Credit: Erin McWilliams

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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 for today and into the future. The Roundtable exists to make stuff happen! Check out our website: <http://rgbbrt.org/>

First Update of Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan Nears Completion *Article by Daniel Boyes*

The 2015 Colorado Water Plan (CWP) was developed in response to Governor John Hickenlooper's 2013 Executive Order and is focused on strategies to address the state's growing water demands. Alongside the CWP, eight Basin Implementation Plans (BIPs) were also developed in 2015 by the state's basin roundtables to identify short- and long-term objectives and projects that are critical to meeting each basin's current and future water challenges.

The original 2015 Rio Grande BIP, developed by the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable (Roundtable), identified several goals aimed at addressing the basin's major water challenges. Another key focus of the 2015 BIP was identification of projects that would help meet the basin's water needs and have multiple benefits for water users and the environment.

As conditions change from year to year, updates to the BIP are important. In 2019, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) worked with the state's basin roundtables to initiate the first update to the original BIPs, and the roundtables are currently in the final stages of completing this update. The Rio Grande Basin Roundtable selected local nonprofit watershed group, the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project (RGHRP) to facilitate the BIP Update process. Led by the RGHRP, the Roundtable formed BIP Update subcommittees, made up of diverse local stakeholders, from local, state, and federal agencies to nonprofits, landowners, and community members. The subcommittees were tasked with developing strategies to meet the basin's water needs, from agricultural and municipal/industrial water use to water administration and water resources education.

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Click the link below to check out our Fun Fact Friday video on the BIP update!
<https://fb.watch/8KZibTWxHV/>

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE BIP INFORMATION:
<http://rgbbrt.org/rgbip-update/> or **READ OUR BIP 101 FACTSHEET:** <https://rgbbrt.org/bip-101-fact-sheet/>



CWCB Approvals Send \$2.8 Million Toward Valley Projects

Article by Matt Hildner

The Colorado Water Conservation Board handed out roughly \$2.8 million last week to five projects in the San Luis Valley, including a first-of-its kind conservation easement program aimed at protecting the region's groundwater.

Colorado Open Lands garnered \$1.4 million for a voluntary conservation easement program, which would reduce groundwater pumping while allowing for continued agricultural use. The management plans accompanying the easements would draw on the experience of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The total cost of the project is \$8.2 million, the majority of which will come from the NRCS.

CWCB granted \$818,030 to the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project for work on the Anaconda, Independent No. 2, Knobloch, Ehrowitz, and Billings ditches. The project would improve diversions for the respective ditches, all of which are in Rio Grande County, while also including fish and boat passages. Work crews would also restore 3,960 linear feet of stream bank through willow planting, bank shaping, and the installation of rock clusters.

The board awarded \$163,406 to the Rio Grande Water Conservation District to develop an in-basin water marketing strategy to secure the roughly 16,000 acre-feet needed by the Subdistricts to offset stream depletions. The program's managers are eyeing tools such as temporary water leases or rotational fallowing toward that end. The Rio Grande Basin Cooperative Project, as the effort is known, also received \$212,105 from the U.S Bureau of Reclamation, and roughly \$163,000 from three other funders toward the \$425,511 project cost.

The Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association received \$24,500 to hold seminars around irrigation, soil health and cropping in 2022. Funds would also go toward developing a stakeholder group to implement projects and the association's hosting of the Congreso de Acequias.

Colorado Master Irrigator, a nonprofit educational group, received \$414,875 to expand trainings on water and energy conservation and other efficiency practices across the state. Part of those funds will focus on expanding offerings into the San Luis Valley through a partnership with the Colorado Agricultural Alliance and Subdistrict No. 1.

All of the funding for the valley projects came from the Colorado Water Plan Grant Program. State lawmakers and Gov Jared Polis gave the grant program a boost in spring with \$15 million from the state's General Fund.



Photo Credit: Emma Reesor

Shown above and below, the Billings and Anaconda Ditches, respectively. CWCB funding will help improve stream conditions at these sites.



Photo Credit: Daniel Boyes

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The updated Rio Grande BIP features project accomplishments since 2015, new data and analyses related to the basin's current and future water use, projects, and strategies to meet the basin's water needs, and updated basin goals. Since the publication of the 2015 BIP, a variety of projects have been completed, many of which were funded in part by the Roundtable. During the BIP update process, more accurate agricultural and municipal water use data and well defined environmental and recreational attributes allowed the Roundtable to identify strategies to meet these water needs. Finally, the updated goals center around healthy watersheds and sustainable surface and groundwater that supports the basin's communities.

CWCB and the Roundtable are seeking feedback on the draft BIP Update, which is currently available on the website at: <https://engagecwcb.org/> This public comment period will remain open through November 15.



Big Meadows Reservoir.
Photo Credit: Heather Dutton.



Colorado Issues Becoming Clearer in Compact Case

Article by Matt Hildner

While Colorado remains largely an observer in the ongoing federal court case over the Rio Grande Compact, the issues that could increase its involvement have become clearer since Texas filed its initial complaint eight years ago. While Colorado remains largely an observer in the ongoing federal court case over the Rio Grande Compact, the issues that could increase its involvement have become clearer since Texas filed its initial complaint eight years ago.

Texas originally made no claims against Colorado as its arguments focused on New Mexico's delivery obligations and the use of groundwater below Elephant Butte Reservoir. Colorado was named a party to the initial complaint simply because it is a signatory to the 1938 compact. But the state's role in the proceedings could change, depending on whether the case impacts Colorado's ability to manage Platoro Reservoir, the Upper Rio Grande Basin's largest post-compact reservoir, and the debits the state is allowed to accrue under the compact. Likewise, decisions by the court that might change how federal water compacts are interpreted could also spur greater involvement by Colorado.

In August, Special Master Michael J. Melloy ordered Texas to file a supplemental complaint with the U.S. Supreme Court because it raised issues distinct from the original complaint and had the potential to greatly expand the scope of the lawsuit. That supplemental complaint claimed, among other issues, that New Mexico violated the compact by not keeping a pool of water equal to the delivery debits it is allowed to accrue in reservoir storage.

While Colorado was not named directly in the complaint, Colorado sees that claim as an attack on how the state manages its reservoirs and the 100,000 acre-feet of debits it is allowed to accrue against its downstream delivery obligation. "It is a bigger concern because it directly affects us," Division Engineer Craig Cotten said earlier this month.

Water users in Colorado's section of the Rio Grande have also informed Attorney General Phil Weiser that they would seek amicus status to join the case should Texas prevail with its claim. "If Texas were to prevail on its claimed interpretation of Arts. VI-VIII, Platoro Reservoir would be rendered effectively useless to the Conejos District because it would be the only reservoir where Colorado could store debit water," stated the memorandum signed by the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, the Conejos Water Conservancy District and the Rio Grande Water Users Association.

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Roundtable Member Highlight!



Nikita Christensen

Rio Grande County Representative

Nikita grew up in the Valley and graduated from Colorado State University after enjoying exchange programs at Cal Poly and Lincoln University in New Zealand. After returning to the valley, Nikita became an associate at Notes & Numbers, LLC where she currently works with 12 irrigation companies and other agribusiness organizations. Nikita's favorite part of this position is working with farmers and ranchers on solutions to issues including water resource management and funding. Nikita is also working with her family's farming operation. After Nikita worked as Rio Grande County Board Of Commissioners Clerk, she decided it would be a great opportunity to represent Rio Grande County to the Basin Roundtable. Nikita is excited to represent a diverse set of stakeholders from around Rio Grande County and work on solutions to improve the Rio Grande Basin Water infrastructure and efficiency for all types of stakeholders.





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Platoro Reservoir has a storage capacity of only 53,571 acre-feet, which would put Colorado in the position of losing roughly half of its allowable debits under the compact. Those debits, as the memorandum noted, were intended to recognize that variations in stream flow would impact Colorado's ability to strictly adhere to the delivery obligations laid out by the compact.

Colorado is also leery of the proceedings giving the Rio Grande Project, which is made up mainly of Elephant Butte and Caballo reservoirs in New Mexico, an authority not called for by the compact. Both the United States, which operates the reservoirs under the Bureau of Reclamation, and New Mexico have argued that the project and its contracts with downstream irrigation districts are silently incorporated into the compact. "They're really trying to add a lot to the compact," Cotten said. A brief by Colorado has asked the special master to rule as a matter of law that the Rio Grande Project is not incorporated into the compact and does not impose obligations to the states under the compact. The issue of obligations under those contracts should be addressed outside the compact, Colorado argued.

Cotten said the special master has set an October 4 trial date. The proceedings will take place in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Both Cotten and Deputy State Engineer Mike Sullivan are expected to testify as fact witnesses, although they may not take the stand until a second phase of the trial in spring.

"It's a fluid situation," Cotten said.



WANT MORE COMPACT INFORMATION?

- Check out our Fun Fact Friday Compact Video on Facebook!
<https://fb.watch/8KZQRdewH3/>





RIO GRANDE BASIN ROUNDTABLE



Photo Credit: Heather Dutton

Upcoming Events:

Nov. 5-7

Join the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project for their virtual fundraiser, Rio Reels, to support river restoration in the Rio Grande Basin! Visit the link [here](#) for tickets and more information!

Nov. 9

November RGBRT meeting. It will be held at the Rio Grande Water Conservation District Office, located at 8805 Independence Way in Alamosa, from 2-4PM. A Zoom link will be listed on the Roundtable website if you'd like to join virtually!

Nov. 17-18

The next scheduled CWCB meeting. Time and location are to be determined. Click [here](#) for the most up to date information!



**RIO REELS
FILM FESTIVAL**

NOV. 5, 2021 7PM
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We're also happy to share statewide initiatives, events, and other water-centric programs.

