

**RIO GRANDE WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS QUARTERLY MEETING  
October 21, 2025, at 10:00 A.M.  
8805 Independence Way  
Alamosa, CO 81101  
And By Zoom Teleconference**

**Present:** Greg Higel, President; Armando Valdez, Vice-President; Zeke Ward, Secretary/Treasurer; Elliott Salazar, Director; Sheldon Rockey, Director; Mark Deacon, Director; Doug Gunnels, Director; Kim Cooley, Director; and Dale Hazard, Director.

**Staff and Consultants:** David Robbins and Arthur Sayre, Hill & Robbins, P.C.; Amber Pacheco, Deputy General Manager; Chris Ivers, Program Manager; Angelo Bellah, Program Manager; Quinton Norris, Program Manager; Wylie Keller, Water Resource Specialist; Kylie Gregg, Office Manager; Clinton Phillips, Davis Engineering; Linda Ramirez, Program Assistant; Rose Vanderpool, Program Assistant; Crystal Benavidez, HCP Coordinator/ Program Assistant; April Mondragon, Administrative Assistant; and, Michael Carson, Database Administrator.

**Guests:** Craig Cotten, Chris Lopez, Nate Reynolds, Sally Wier, Larry Brown, Patrick Ortiz, Ryan Morgan, Theresa Dellaport, Tony Aloia, Erin Minks, Ryan Unterreiner, Mat Beshears, Karen Hazard, George Whitten, Morgan Dingfelder, Heather Dutton, Paul Formisano, Nick Saenz, Jeff Derry, Laura Spann, Mike Blakeman, and Rob Phillips.

**CALL TO ORDER**

President Greg Higel called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. There was a quorum present for the meeting. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**INTRODUCTION OF STAFF AND GUESTS**

President Higel welcomed all those present and asked for introductions.

**APPROVE AGENDA**

President Higel asked that Tony Aloia from CPW report before noon, add a report from Larry Brown from CSU Extension and add Public Comment. He asked for any other changes, additions or a motion to approve the agenda. A motion was made by Sheldon Rockey to approve the agenda as amended. The motion was seconded by Mark Deacon and unanimously approved.

**OATH OF NEW DIRECTOR**

President Higel asked for the oath of the new Director. Dale Hazard, representing Saguache County, was sworn in as a Board Member of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District. He was welcomed to the Board.

**APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA**

President Higel asked for approval of the consent agenda items:

- July 15, 2025-Quarterly Meeting Minutes
- August 11, 2025-Special Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Elliott Salazar and unanimously approved.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

President Higel asked for the Financial Report. Amber Pacheco presented the Profit and Loss Statement and highlighted delinquent property taxes, lower ownership tax, interest on taxes and treasurer fees. Ms. Pacheco went over reimbursements, interest on investments, misc. revenue, Senate Bill revenue and the remaining balance. She also highlighted administration expenses, the amount budgeted for vehicles and the completion of the garage. Ms. Pacheco went over professional services, special projects, cooperative agreements, construction/maintenance and possible funds to be used on transducers. Discussion was held on how the funds from the River Maintenance Cooperative could be used and what it was originally intended for. She presented the Balance Sheet and noted the balance in the checking account. David Robbins explained how the funds received from the AWDI case could be used in accordance with Tabor. Ms. Pacheco also reported the accounts receivables, current liabilities

and long-term liabilities. Discussion was held on how investment accounts are set up and other potential investment opportunities.

A motion was made by Mark Deacon to approve the Financial Report as presented. The motion was seconded by Sheldon Rockey and unanimously approved.

### **MANAGER'S REPORT**

President Higel asked for the Manager's report. Amber Pacheco updated the Board on the Water Smart grant and the acceptance of a second round of funding to finalize tools and continue to build an online trading platform for Subdistrict No. 1 surface water credits. She reported she has been attending the soil conservation meetings. She announced the 2026 Annual Colorado Water Congress convention will be held in January and asked if any Board of Directors were interested in attending. Armando, Elliott and Greg all responded they would like to attend this year.

### **COLORADO STATE PARKS & WILDLIFE-TONY ALOIA**

President Higel asked for the Colorado State Parks & Wildlife report. Tony Aloia described the situation at Big Meadows Reservoir during the large October rain event. He reported on an estimated 800 cfs flow which damaged the spillway and was a thousand-year storm. Mr. Aloia described the extent of the damage caused by the storm and the plan to fix it so there would be no problems during the runoff next year. He reported eleven (11) inches of rain was recorded by the new rain gauges within five (5) days. Mr. Aloia highlighted the emergency response, the closure of Highway 160, erosion of the road banks and the damage to the Park Creek Bridge. Mr. Aloia also reported CPW utilized their water reserves to help with the drought this summer and provided an update on upcoming projects.

### **SALAZAR CENTER-PAUL FORMISANO**

President Higel asked for the Salazar Center report. Paul Formisano highlighted the values the Salazar Center brings to the Valley. He reported seeking funding in the amount of \$35,000 to support the director salary in 2026. Mr. Formisano gave a high-level overview of the Center's accomplishments and ongoing projects. He explained why a written request had not been submitted. Discussion was held on other funding sources and contributors. Amber Pacheco described the funding request process.

### **MANAGER'S REPORT (CONTINUED)**

- *Consider approval of funding request from Saguache County for Russell Springs monitoring project*

Theresa Dellaport and Mat Beshears presented a map of Russell Springs and provided a summary of the work being proposed at Russell Springs in Saguache County. Ms. Dellaport reported Saguache County is participating in the RGDSS Peer Review Team meetings. She described previous work done by HRS using the HPT drilling method being proposed for this project. Mr. Beshears added this drilling method is a way to measure the porousness of the subsurface. Ms. Dellaport explained Saguache County would donate three (3) transducers to be part of the well measurement monitoring in the new wells. She highlighted the request for funding is for \$10,000 and she presented a summary of the costs for the Russell Springs investigation.

Amber Pacheco reported Matt Seitz with HRS reached out to the District seeking funding for a 3<sup>rd</sup> and possibly a 4<sup>th</sup> well for the study being done to provide additional information to be reviewed for Phase 8 of the RGDSS Model. She highlighted the request for this Russell Springs project is that the monitoring of these new wells becomes a part of the District's monitoring network and continues on a long-term basis. Ms. Pacheco suggested the District purchase In-situ transducers which would then belong to the District, along with the data collected. Use of the same equipment as we use in all other wells in the District's well monitoring network will make it work more seamlessly. Mr. Beshears provided the proposed depths of the new monitoring wells. Ms. Dellaport explained how the monitoring wells would benefit water users within Saguache County.

There was discussion regarding the report that would be prepared using the District's funding. The Board stressed that the report must be provided to the District Board immediately once it is finalized and not at some other time after others have had time to review it. Ms. Dellaport agreed the report would be shared with the District and HRS once it was finalized.

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to approve the funding request in the amount of \$10,000 for the Saguache County Russell Springs monitoring project. The motion was seconded by Mark Deacon. Kim Cooley voted no. The motion was passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Mark Deacon to authorize staff to purchase data loggers that are compatible with the District's existing monitoring system to the extent required to add the wells to the monitoring well program. The motion was seconded by Armando Valdez and unanimously approved.

- Discuss the draft 2026 Budget

Amber Pacheco presented the draft 2026 Rio Grande Water Conservation District Budget. She highlighted the draft budget was emailed to the Board by Cleave Simpson. She thanked Kylie Gregg for her assistance in the process. Ms. Pacheco explained the budget process and presented the working copy of the 2026 budget. She went over the estimated ending fund balance, anticipated revenues, and anticipated expenditures. Ms. Pacheco highlighted an increase in employees' health insurance premiums. Ms. Pacheco also highlighted the amount budgeted for the anticipated purchase of additional filing cabinets.

**The meeting recessed for lunch at 12:30 p.m. and resumed at 1:30 p.m.**

- Set a date for Personnel or Management Committee to meet on HR Policies

A Management Committee meeting was tentatively scheduled for November 4, 2025 at 1:00.

- Consider a date in November for a 2026 Budget Work Session

A Budget Work Session was scheduled for November 24, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. The Budget Hearing was scheduled for December 11, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.

- Consider approval of the purchase of 2 replacement vehicles

Amber Pacheco provided the amount budgeted to replace two (2) of the District's vehicles. She provided the make, model and mileage of the vehicles set to be replaced. Discussion was held on type of replacement vehicles and how to dispose of the vehicles being replaced.

A motion was made by Sheldon Rockey to allow staff to purchase two (2) new vehicles within the budget and allow staff to dispose of the two (2) vehicles being replaced in a manner that would give the District the highest return. The motion was seconded by Elliott Salazar and unanimously approved.

- Consider approval of District's Investment Policy

Amber Pacheco reminded the Board of the presentation given at the July quarterly meeting regarding constructing a policy to allow for more options and flexibility with the District and Subdistricts assets. She described the background information and direction given by the auditors. Ms. Pacheco reported on the conversations held with David Robbins and Matt Montgomery regarding other public entities policies. She gave an overview of the policy. Discussion was held on who would determine the risk, credit quality standards, and setting the highest credit quality based risk standards. David Robbins reported being in the process of reviewing the policies legal citations.

A motion was made by Sheldon Rockey to conditionally approve the District's Investment Policy as presented subject to review and adjustments by legal counsel.

Amber Pacheco reported on the qualifications laid out in the policy. She explained how the acceptance of the Investment Policy, including any necessary legal changes, allows staff to prepare a list of banks and the District will utilize for investments. Final approval of the list will be sought at a future meeting to allow staff to start looking into new investments.

The motion was seconded by Armando Valdez and unanimously approved.

- Discussion and possible approval of a change to benefits offered for EE Health Insurance

Amber Pacheco reported on the 17% increase to the District's health insurance policy for 2026 over the three (3) tiers offered. She described the three (3) tiers and the. Ms. Pacheco also described the advantage of offering the different tiers.

Ms. Pacheco described a proposal for the Board to allow the District to contribute an equal amount towards all employee's health insurance premiums for 2026 regardless of the tier they select to potentially reduce the District and employee's annual costs and reduce the impact of the large increase in premiums. The amount contributed from the District would be equal to 80% of the individual premium for Tier 3, to calculate the highest contribution from the District, which is then applied against the premiums. This proposed change does not affect the 60% contributed for spouses and children.

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to make the proposed change/adjustment for the employee's health insurance. The motion was seconded by Elliott Salazar and unanimously approved.

- *Renewal of Memo of Understanding for the Radar Project*

Amber Pacheco reminded the Board of the original Memo of Understanding (MOU) for the doppler radar signed in 2021 which was a five (5) year agreement. Nine (9) entities were contributing \$5,000 each on an annual basis. She reported she received a request from Vern Heersink at Alamosa County to renew the agreement at the \$5,000 level. The Board agreed to continue contributing at the \$5,000 level for a new five (5) year agreement.

### **COLORADO OPEN LANDS-SALLY WIER**

President Higel asked for the Colorado Open Lands report. Sally Wier updated the Board on the continued efforts to do new conservation easements with farmers and ranchers. She highlighted the projects in Costilla County supporting the acequia community and explained how they are looking to expand into Conejos County. Ms. Wier reported COL was in the process of hiring a Dry Land Restoration Coordinator who would be assisting with land transition planning for lands coming out of irrigated production.

### **PROGRAM MANAGER'S REPORTS**

President Higel asked for Program Manager's reports.

- *Subdistrict No. 1-Quinton Norris*

Quinton Norris updated the Board on a decrease in the CREP rental rates and the potential ways to get the rates to increase. Mark Deacon commented on CSU's inflated rates. Larry Brown explained how CSU solicitates rates. Mr. Norris commented on the importance of working to get rates up and increasing participation for 2027. He provided an update on meter readings and pumping numbers as well as an update on the recharge project. Amber Pacheco explained why the District has to approve the Subdistrict No. 1 budget in October which is set to change in the new Plan of Water Management. Mr. Norris presented the draft 2026 budget. He went over the Administrative, CREP and Variable Fee, the amount budgeted to fund the Airborne Electromagnetic Survey (AEM) and potential water purchases. Mr. Norris explained why the Board decided not to offer the Well Purchase Program in 2026 and reported on the approval of the Subdistrict No. 1 draft 2026 budget by the Board of Manager's at their September quarterly meeting.

A motion was made by Sheldon Rockey to approve the Subdistrict No. 1 2026 budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Mark Deacon and unanimously approved.

- *Subdistrict No.'s 2, 3, and 6-Angelo Bellah*

Angelo Bellah reported Subdistrict No.'s 2, 3, and 6 continue to seek replacement water to either purchase or lease and to secure as many long-term forbearance agreements as possible. He reported on the pumping reduction programs offered by Subdistrict No.'s 3 and 6 and the SWSP in conjunction with the Trinchera Subdistrict on the Los Sauces Ditch system. Mr. Bellah explained how both Subdistricts would owe depletions to La Jara Creek under Phase 7 of the Model and how they are working to secure remedies. He also provided the dollar amount each Subdistrict would be contributing toward the AEM study as well as the number of miles of land to be covered by the flights. Mr. Bellah gave an update on the Subdistrict No. 2 Williams Creek Squaw Pass Diversion and the amount of acre-feet they were able to store. He updated the Board on the property maintenance and improvements on the Alpha Hay Farms property. Mr. Bellah highlighted the five (5) year SWSP limit. Finally, Mr. Bellah asked for approval to enter into an agreement to accept the full price purchase offers received on Tracts 5 and 7 of Alpha Hay Farms.

A motion was made by Elliott Salazar to accept the full price offers for Tracts 5 and 7 on the Alpha Tracts. The motion was seconded by Amando Valdez and unanimously approved.

Mr. Bellah reported there were two (2) more tracts to sell on the alpha property. He gave an update on the Sandoval land and water rights purchase and the purchase of the Sowards well. Mr. Bellah reported on the lowered HCU available from the SWSP lease/fallow program on the Alamosa Creek Canal. He announced a lease/fallow program is being offered in Subdistrict No. 6. He highlighted a new Participation Contract is being worked on with the USFWS. Mr. Bellah asked the Board to consider the approval of a one year short-term storage agreement with the SLVID to increase the amount of storage capacity in Rio Grande Reservoir.

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to approve the one-year storage agreement. The motion was seconded by Zeke Ward and unanimously approved.

- Subdistrict No. 's 4 and 5-Chris Ivers

Chris Ivers reported on the continued focus of Subdistrict No. 4 to revegetate the Peachwood property. He highlighted the number of quarters leased out and described some of the issues they have seen with the revegetation. Mr. Ivers reported the largest issue for Subdistrict No.'s 1, 4 and 5 is to make replacements to Saguache Creek on a wet year. He gave an update on the augmentation wells and on negotiations with the owner of North Star Farms. George Whitten highlighted the exceptional job done by Chris Ivers and the struggles associated with revegetation. Mr. Whitten reported being the District's representative on the Closed Basin Project Operating Committee. He highlighted the importance of the Project and asked the Board to consider setting up and attending a presentation given by Nathan Reynolds on how the Project operates and ties into the whole system. President Higel asked that all Subdistrict Board of Managers be invited and the presentation/tour to be scheduled at the January meeting. Mr. Whitten suggested a presentation also be given at the Ag Conference.

### **DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S REPORT-DAVID ROBBINS**

President Higel asked for the District Attorney report. David Robbins gave an update on the Supreme Court case Texas vs New Mexico and Colorado. He reported on his attendance to the Coalition of Rio Grande Water Users with Cleave Simpson. Mr. Robbins explained the Judge's denial for summary judgement on the Plan of Water Management No. 4 challenge. He gave an update on the NEWUA and SWAG cases and reported on two (2) challenges to the way Phase 7 of the RGDSS Groundwater Model is operated and interpreted. Amber Pacheco reported the District filed a request for hearing on Phase 7 Response Functions in regards to the notice timing and how it would need to be ratified by the Board. Mr. Robbins explained why the District filed a statement of objection in the second challenge to Phase 7 Model.

A motion was made by Mark Deacon to ratify the filing of the request for a hearing for the Phase 7 Response Functions. The motion was seconded by Armando Valdez and unanimously approved.

Mr. Robbins reported on a request for the District's support from David Cooper, a Professor at CSU who is working to restore Middle Spring Creek. He also highlighted controversy surrounding the Fix our Forests Bill and reported the District did not need to take a position on it. Mr. Robbins touched on the proposed statute being drafted by the Lower Arkansas Water Conservancy District regarding revegetation requirements for changes of ag water rights.

### **DISTRICT ENGINEER'S REPORT-CLINTON PHILLIPS**

President Higel asked for the District Engineer's report. Clinton Phillips presented a map of the San Luis Valley Unconfined Aquifer Storage Study Area. He went over the change for October 2025, the current aquifer level, the current five (5) year average and the acre-feet needed to get back to the -400,000 level. Mr. Phillips presented a snapshot of the study period from 2002-current and reported on the record lowest level ever in September. He presented a graph of the entire study area and gave an update on the confined aquifer monitoring well measurements by model layer.

### **SENATOR HICKENLOOPER'S OFFICE-PATRICK ORTIZ**

President Higel asked for a report from Senator Hickenlooper's office. Patrick Ortiz updated the Board on the Fix our Forest Act and some of the disruptions in connection with the Government shutdown.

### **U.S.B.R REPORT-NATE REYNOLDS**

President Higel asked for U.S.B.R. report. Nathan Reynolds gave the operations update. A copy of the report is attached.

### **DIVISION ENGINEER'S REPORT-CRAG COTTEN**

President Higel asked for the Division Engineer's report. Craig Cotten gave an update on the two (2) significant rain events in October which lasted several days each. He reported on the uniqueness of the storms and highlighted the peak cfs on the Rio Grande at Del Norte. Mr. Cotten commented on the dam concern at Big Meadows and reported on the estimated dollar amount of damage caused by the rain events. He reported sending out a new ten-day report with the increased acre-feet on the Conejos and Rio Grande. Mr. Cotten explained how the rain impacted the upper index station leading to Colorado possibly being under-delivered on both river systems. He reported the Irrigation Season would most likely end on November 1, 2025. Mr. Cotten commented on the upcoming 2026 trials and

reported on the retirement of James Heath and announced the new Division 5 Engineer is Tyler Benton.

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION-LARRY BROWN**

President Higel asked for the Colorado State University Extension report. Larry Brown provided an update on the educational events coming up and highlighted their continued work on alternative crops and revegetation.

**SLVWCD-HEATHER DUTTON**

President Higel asked for the SLVWCD report. Heather Dutton welcomed the new Board of Directors and thanked them for serving. She described the 2026 funding request of \$65,000 for the ASO flights. Amber Pacheco reported the \$65,000 was included in the proposed 2026 budget. Ms. Dutton also provided the details on a second funding request in 2026 to support the Water Wise Landscaping Partnership. This request was also included in the 2026 Budget.

**RIO GRANDE HEADWATERS LAND TRUST-MATT PETERSON**

President Higel asked for the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust report. Matt Peterson gave an update on the work they are doing on conservation easements and other various projects and provided the details in connection with the 2026 funding request.

**RIO GRANDE HEADWATERS RESTORATION PROJECT-CASSANDRA McCUEN**

President Higel asked for the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project report. Cassandra McCuen presented drone footage taken during the high-water event. She reported on the Rio Grande diversion improvement project, the Farmers Union Canal Improvements Project, Phase six (6) of the Rio Grande and the Conejos River Restoration Program. She highlighted RGHRP continues to assist in the coordination of the IRA and Roundtable Education efforts, tours, communications and social media. Ms. McCuen announced the date of the Rio Reels fundraiser and went over the 2026 funding request.

**HEADWATERS ALLIANCE-MIKE BLAKEMAN**

President Higel asked for the Headwaters Alliance report. Mike Blakeman reported on the 2026 funding request. He described the current projects, upcoming projects, and other funding sources received.

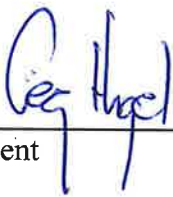
**COLORADO DUST ON SNOW-JEFF DERRY**

President Higel asked for the Colorado Dust on Snow report. Jeff Derry presented a snapshot of last winter's storm data as well as the depth of the snowpack at Wolf Creek. He presented precipitation graphs and reported seeing minimal dust activity. Mr. Derry reported they have updated the stations with new technology and tools. He described the BOR Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program and went over his 2026 funding request.

**ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for January 20, 2026.



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President



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Secretary/Treasurer

# Bureau of Reclamation Report to the RGWCD

October 21, 2025

## OPERATIONS

Water salvage operations continued as recommended by the Project Operating Committee to meet Rio Grande Compact and mitigation obligations.

For the YTD (1/1/2025 to 09/30/2025)

A total of 1,571AF was delivered to the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge through CHO1 & 2.

A total of 1,544 AF was delivered to the Blanca Wildlife Habitat Area through CHO3 & 4.

Delivery to the Rio Grande has been 4,943 AF.

San Luis Lake is dry at an Elevation of 7509.0 ft.

### San Luis Lake (1/1/2025 to 9/30/2025)

|               |                               |                |
|---------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| San Luis Lake | San Luis Lake Elevation ..... | 7509.0 ft. MSL |
|               | Storage .....                 | 0 acre-feet    |
|               | TDS .....                     | N/A ppm TDS    |

### Project Deliveries: (1/1/2025 to 9/30/2025)

|                |   |                          |
|----------------|---|--------------------------|
| Deliveries to: | Rio Grande—total.....                                 | 4,943** acre-feet        |
|                | Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge—total.....           | 1,571* acre-feet         |
|                | Blanca Wildlife Habitat Area—total.....               | 1,544* acre-feet         |
|                | San Luis Lake—total.....                              | 0 acre-feet              |
|                | Head Lake (West).....                                 | 25* acre-feet            |
|                | <b>Total Deliveries as of September 30, 2025.....</b> | <b>8,083** acre-feet</b> |

*\*\*Preliminary totals subject to review*

*\*Includes 71 AF exchange of Continental Reservoir water delivered to BLM.*

*\*Includes 163 AF exchange CPW Weminuche water stored in Beaver Park Reservoir delivered to BLM*

*\*Includes 260 AF exchange of Shaw Reservoir water delivered to BLM*

*\*Includes 250 AF exchange between BLM and FWS*

*\*Includes 25 AF exchange CPW Beaver Park Reservoir water delivered to Head Lake*

## **MAINTENANCE BRANCH**

Well rehabilitation operations were completed for 12 salvage wells to date in 2025. Weed management continued at canal check structures. Blade work and mowing continued on lateral roads and canal berms. Preventative maintenance on project features is ongoing.

## **WATER LABORATORY**

A total of 624 samples were collected from the Closed Basin Project during the period of April 1, 2025, through September 30, 2025.

Total Dissolved Solids at the Outlet was an average of 284 mg/L for the period.