

**RIO GRANDE WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS QUARTERLY MEETING  
April 15, 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; Peggy Godfrey, Director; Mark Deacon, Director; Doug Gunnels, Director; and Kim Cooley, Director.

**Absent:** Elliott Salazar, Director and Sheldon Rockey, Director

**Staff and Consultants:** David Robbins, Hill & Robbins, P.C.; Amber Pacheco, Deputy General Manager; Chris Ivers, Program Manager; Angelo Bellah, Program Manager; Quinton Norris, Program Manager; Kylie Gregg, Office Manager; Clinton Phillips, Davis Engineering; Rose Vanderpool, Program Assistant; Linda Ramirez, Program Assistant; April Mondragon, Administrative Assistant; and, Michael Carson, Database Administrator.

**Guests:** Jessica Valdez, Ray Newmyer, Hannah Thill, Christine Arbogast, Amber Lidell, Laura Spann, John Mattingly, Heidi Shrek, Rob Phillips, Heather Dutton, Cassandra McCuen, Laura Cusick, Tony Aloia, Morgan Dingfelder, Chris Lopez, Rio de la Vista, Paul Formisano, Nate Reynolds, Craig Cotten, Erin Minks, Sally Wier, Willie Hoffner, Chris Schaefer, Jocelyn Catterson, David Hofmann, and Ryan Unterreiner.

**CALL TO ORDER**

President Greg Higel called the meeting to order at 10:05 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 for any changes, additions or a motion to approve the agenda. Amber Pacheco asked that Patrick Ortiz's report from Senator Hickenlooper's office be moved to after public comment. A motion was made by Doug Gunnels to approve the agenda as amended. The motion was seconded by Zeke Ward and unanimously approved.

**OATH OF NEW DIRECTOR**

President Higel asked for the oath of the new Director. Kim Cooley, representing Alamosa County, was sworn in as a Board of Director of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District. He was welcomed to the Board. President Higel announced the appointment of Sheldon Rockey as the new representative of Rio Grande County; he was not able to attend the meeting.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

President Higel asked for the election of officers. David Robbins explained the election process and asked for nominations for President of the Board of Directors, the seat currently held by Greg Higel. A motion was made by Doug Gunnels to retain Greg Higel as President of the Board of Directors. The motion was seconded by Zeke Ward. Doug Gunnels made a motion for nominations to cease. The motion was seconded by Mark Deacon. Greg Higel was elected President by acclamation.

President Higel asked for nominations for Vice-President, the seat currently held by Armando Valdez. A motion was made by Mark Deacon to retain Armando Valdez as Vice-President by acclamation. The motion was seconded by Zeke Ward and unanimously approved. Armando Valdez was elected Vice-President by acclamation.

President Higel asked for nominations for Secretary/Treasurer, the seat currently held by Zeke Ward. A motion was made by Mark Deacon to nominate Zeke Ward as Secretary/Treasurer by acclamation. The motion was seconded by Doug Gunnels and unanimously approved. Zeke Ward was elected Secretary/Treasurer by acclamation.

## **APPOINTMENTS OF EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS TO SUBDISTRICT BOARD OF MANAGERS**

President Higel asked for appointments of the Ex-Officio Members to Subdistrict Board of Managers. Amber Pacheco reminded the Board of the current Ex-Officio members.

A motion was made by Mark Deacon to nominate Sheldon Rockey as Subdistrict No. 1 Ex-Officio member. The motion was seconded by Kim Cooley and unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to nominate Greg Higel as Subdistrict No. 2 Ex-Officio member. The motion was seconded by Doug Gunnels and unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to nominate Elliott Salazar as Subdistrict No. 3 Ex-Officio member. The motion was seconded by Doug Gunnels and unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to nominate Peggy Godfrey as Subdistrict No. 4 Ex-Officio member. The motion was seconded by Mark Deacon and unanimously approved.

Doug Gunnels reported he felt he had not done the position justice but would be willing to continue to serve as Subdistrict No. 5 Ex-Officio Member.

A motion was made by Kim Cooley to nominate Doug Gunnels as Subdistrict No. 5 Ex-Officio member. The motion was seconded by Mark Deacon and unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Mark Deacon to nominate Armando Valdez as Subdistrict No. 6 Ex-Officio member. The motion was seconded by Zeke Ward and unanimously approved.

## **APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA**

President Higel asked for approval of the consent agenda items:

- January 21, 2025-Quarterly Meeting

A motion was made by Mark Deacon to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Zeke Ward and was unanimously approved.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

President Higel asked for public comment. Willie Hoffner thanked the Board for their service and explained how his system on his property is set up. He thanked David Robbins and commented on the advice he gave him years ago. Mr. Hoffner explained how he has conserved water on his property and commented on his Johnny Smith water right.

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

President Higel asked for Senator Hickenlooper's office report. Patrick Ortiz highlighted the areas he oversees and reported on a bill introduced to the Senate last week. He explained how the bill would strengthen fire management. Mr. Ortiz also gave an update on the Inflation Reduction Act funding.

## **FINANCIAL REPORT**

President Higel asked for the financial report. Amber Pacheco presented the Profit and Loss Budget vs. Actual. She highlighted the property tax revenue for the year, interest on investments, and the status of the Senate Bill funding. Ms. Pacheco reported on the change in salaries in connection with the Well Technician position. She went over office building expenses, insurance and the equipment replacement budget to replace some of the District's vehicles. Ms. Pacheco explained the long-term storage lease and highlighted special projects. She also presented the Balance Sheet and went over the balance in the checking account, accounts receivable and accounts payable.

A motion was made by Doug Gunnels to approve the financial report as presented. The motion was seconded by Armando Valdez and unanimously approved.

## **MANAGER'S REPORT**

President Higel asked for the Manager's report.

- *Update on Colorado's Upper Rio Grande Water Cooperative Project*

Amber Pacheco gave an update on the Water Smart grant from the Bureau of Reclamation. She also updated the Board on the presentations, conferences and meetings she had attended. Ms. Pacheco reported working with Kylie Gregg and CPS HR Consulting on job analysis reviews. She provided an update on the garage build project and a decision to be made on whether or not to pave the overflow parking lot. She also asked if a completion bond would be necessary. Armando Valdez commented on the stewardship of public dollars. Doug Gunnels commented on the need to act in a conservative manner with public funds. It was agreed by all that a completion bond is necessary as was included in the contract.

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to approve adding a concrete pad in front of the apron of the building for twenty (20) feet, not to exceed \$30,000, with a 4-inch pad, and class 6 road base compacted for the remainder of the overflow parking lot. The motion was seconded by Mark Deacon and unanimously approved.

Amber Pacheco reported the Rio Grande Compact Meeting would be held at the District with a reception the night before at the Adams State University Vistas Restaurant. She also gave an update on the IRA funding in connection with projects in the San Luis Valley. President Higel thanked staff for their hard work.

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

President Higel asked for Program Manager's reports.

- *Subdistrict No. 1-Quinton Norris*

Quinton Norris reported finishing up and submitting the Annual Replacement Plan. He thanked staff for assisting in getting it completed. Mr. Norris provided the number of Fallow/Well Purchase Program contracts submitted, how many were approved and how they benefited the Subdistrict. He reported that preparing the 2024 Annual Report helped him prepare for 2025.

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

Angelo Bellah provided an update on activities and current business with the Subdistricts he manages. He reported on the continued efforts to seek opportunities to purchase/lease water rights to replace depletions. Mr. Bellah reported working with the PRT and Division of Water Resources on Phase 7 of the RGDSS model. He highlighted the potential of Subdistrict No. 3 and 6 to owe depletions to La Jara Creek. Mr. Bellah said all Subdistricts would continue to work to secure as many long-term forbearance agreements as possible.

- *Review and consider Resolution to approve the CWCB loan for purchase of Navajo Development Williams Creek Squaw Pass diversions for SD #2*

Angelo Bellah reported on the Boards approval of the loan and asked them to consider approving/affirming the resolution.

A motion was made by Armando Valdez to approve the Resolution for Subdistrict No. 2 to apply for a loan from the Colorado Water Conservation Board. The motion was seconded by Mark Deacon and unanimously approved.

Mr. Bellah updated the Board on the Subdistrict No. 3 Alpha Hay property, negotiations on the El Coda Ditch, the Sowards well purchase and the Subdistrict No. 6 Monte Vista Canal SWSP.

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

Chris Ivers gave a Subdistrict No. 4 update on the Peachwood revegetation. He explained how the Subdistrict is working through the best course of action and seeking a more permanent solution to Well Injury Payment agreements on San Luis Creek. Discussion was held on the revegetation project and whether or not it has been successful. Mr. Ivers reported on the approval of Subdistrict No. 5's CWCB loan and the progress of the augmentation well project. He highlighted some of the challenges that come with drilling an augmentation well.

- *Review and approve Revised Purchase and Sale Agreement for the Purchase of North Star Water Rights*

Mr. Ivers reported on the negotiations being held in connection with the Purchase and Sale Agreement for the purchase of North Star water rights.

- *Review and Consider Resolution to Approve the CWCB Loan for Purchase of North Star Water Rights for SD #5*

Mr. Ivers asked the Board to consider approval of Subdistrict No. 5 entering into the CWCB loan contract. He provided the terms of the loan and the plan to offset the current fees and payback the loans.

A motion was made by Mark Deacon to approve the Resolution for Subdistrict No. 5 to approve the CWCB loan for purchase of the North Star property. The motion was seconded by Armando Valdez and unanimously approved.

#### **KOGOVSEK & ASSOCIATES-CHRISTINE ARBOGAST**

President Higel asked for the Kogovsek & Associates report. Christine Arbogast updated the Board on the issues with the Bureau of Reclamation IRA fund and other changes in the way government agencies work. She reported on the new Director of the NRCS, the Fix Our Forest Act and reported on the potential of the Forest Service to combine agencies.

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

President Higel asked for the District Engineer's report. Clinton Phillips presented the map of the San Luis Valley unconfined aquifer storage study area map. He gave the change for March 2025, the change between March 2024 and 2025, the current aquifer level, the current five (5) year average level and the acre-feet needed to get to the -400,000 level. Mr. Phillips reported on Subdistricts No. 1's lowest pumping level ever recorded last year. He also presented the confined aquifer monitoring well measurements preliminary data by model layer.

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

President Higel asked for the District Attorney report. David Robbins thanked Amber Pacheco for participating at the Law of the Rio Grande in Santa Fe. He provided an update on the Texas vs New Mexico and Colorado court case and the SWAG/NEWUA challenge. Mr. Robbins thanked Clinton Phillips on his excellent work on the expert report. He highlighted Pete Ampe's continued efforts to assist Program Managers and Subdistricts; the upcoming trials; and, the Compact meeting/reception being held in Alamosa.

**The meeting recessed for lunch at 12:25 p.m. and resumed at 1:35 p.m.**

#### **THE NATURE CONSERVANCY-HEIDI SHERK**

President Higel asked for the Nature Conservancy report. Heidi Sherk updated the Board on the Nature Conservancy's Zapata Ranch reserve. She described the location and the idea to purchase the Baca Ranch in an effort to address water export. Ms. Sherk presented a map of the Medano-Zapata Preserve Conservation landscape. She reported the Conservancy was involved in conversations on how to manage the buffalo and seeking ideas and ways to be more connected to the San Luis Valley and its heritage.

#### **COLORADO LEGISLATIVE STRATEGIES-GARIN VORTHMANN**

President Higel asked for Colorado Legislative Strategies. Garin Vorthmann provided a legislative update. A copy of her report is attached.

#### **DISCUSSION REGARDING PRIMARY WATER PROJECT**

President Higel asked for the discussion regarding Primary Water Project. Ray Newmyer explained why Marianna King was not able to attend. He reported some of the experts involved in the feasibility study may be getting ahead of themselves. Mr. Newmyer reported on his suggestion to move the study from the east side of the Valley to the West in order to be closer to the magma. He explained the depth of the well at the Hooper pool and the cost associated with drilling to that depth. Mr. Newmyer explained why he is convinced primary water does exist and feels the District should reconsider funding the study. Discussion was held on how water is considered tributary or non-tributary. David Robbins pointed out facts of the current state of the law.

#### **SENATOR BENNET'S OFFICE-ERIN MINKS**

President Higel asked for Senator Bennet's office report. Erin Minks reported on the programs being cancelled or rescinded in connection with the IRA funding. Ms. Minks described her roll within the office of Senator Bennet and reported she would be leaving the position at the end of May. President Higel thanked her for her hard work over the years.

### **DIVISION ENGINEER'S -CRAIG COTTEN**

President Higel asked for the Division Engineer's report. Craig Cotten commented on the informational meeting he attended with Ray Newmyer and Marianna King. He presented an update on the snowpack and stated it was similar to 2018. The Rio Grande Basin was the lowest in the state. He reported on the Rio Grande basin SNOTELs and the NRCS April 1<sup>st</sup> forecasted runoff. Mr. Cotten also gave an update on the condition of the upper Rio Grande basin reservoirs and the seasonal temperature and precipitation outlook. He provided the irrigation start date, expected runoff peak, curtailment percentages and Compact delivery requirements. Mr. Cotten informed those present about the Rio Grande Compact annual meeting to be held at the District office building. Mr. Cotton also gave an update on the timeline and next steps in connection to the Rio Grande Compact lawsuit.

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

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

### **SLVWC DISTRICT REPORT-HEATHER DUTTON**

President Higel asked for the SLVWC District report. Heather Dutton reported on the continued efforts to augment commercial and domestic wells throughout the Valley. She highlighted the special projects being worked on and presented the Airborne Snow Observatory survey report.

### **RIO GRANDE HEADWATERS LAND TRUST-LAURA CUSICK**

President Higel asked for the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust report. Laura Cusick provided an update on the number of easements closed, how many more easements they hope to close this year and the small-scale projects being worked on.

### **RIO GRANDE HEADWATERS RESORATION PROJECT-CASSANDRA MCCUEN**

President Higel asked for the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project report. Cassandra McCuen presented photos from the Conejos River Partnership Project. She provided an update on the Alamosa Riverfront Project, the Independent #2 and Ehrowitz Ditch projects. Ms. McCuen reported on the Wildfire Ready Action planning, education efforts with the Rio Grande Basin Round Table and the Closed Basin Project tour.

### **EDUCATION REPORT-HANNAH THILL**

President Higel asked for the education report. Hannah Thill updated the Board on the kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade education programs. She gave an update on Envirothon, traveling with the river trailer and planning for the Youth Conservation Camp.

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

President Higel asked for Colorado Open Lands report. Sally Wier gave an update on conservation easements throughout the Valley. She reported on the efforts to manage the Peachwood property with Subdistrict No. 4 and the challenges with funding sources.

### **U.S.F. & W.S. REPORT-CHRIS SHAFFER**

President Higel asked for the U.S.F. & W.S. report. Chris Shaffer reported working with Subdistrict No. 6 on changes to a contract. He highlighted a tour to take place on the Baca where Chris Ivers has been asked to be a speaker.

### **U.S.B.L.M. REPORT -TAYLOR APPLEWHITE**

President Higel asked for the U.S.B.L.M report. Taylor Applewhite updated the Board on the redrilling of a well at Blanca Wetlands. He commented on the frozen federal funds as well as the projects being held up.

### **RIO GRANDE NATIONAL FOREST-AMBER LIDELL**

President Higel asked for the Rio Grande National Forest report. Amber Lidell was present to give the report. She reported on the new Watershed Restoration Action Plans, AOP Work, OSV Travel Management, GIS updates and Willow Creek Watershed Restoration.

### **COLORADO STATE PARKS AND WILDLIFE REPORT-TONY ALOIA**

President Higel asked for the Colorado State Parks and Wildlife report. Tony Aloia updated the Board on projects they finished last year. He described the need to find ways to cool the river water in order to get higher flows and protect the habitat.

**DISCUSSION WITH JOHN MATTINGLY REGARDING GUEST EDITORIAL IN VALLEY COURIER**

President Higel asked for the discussion with John Mattingly regarding guest editorial in the Valley Courier. John Mattingly introduced himself and described his farming history. He reported writing the article out of concern and wanted to show the magnitude of the problem. Mr. Mattingly described how he feels water is the capital of the Valley and is not sustainable. He explained how the District could play a part in his theory. Armando Valdez commented on leveraging capital and the need to become more innovated. David Robbins reported on the interest of those wanting to preserve their livelihood and lifestyle in the Valley for generations to come and commented on the importance of the Valley holding on to the water they have. Mark Deacon commented on the importance of protecting farming and the lifestyle. Mr. Robbins explained the problem with those that think they can make money by selling water.

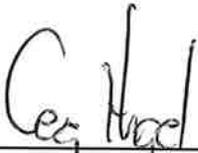
**OTHER DIRECTOR REPORTS**

President Higel asked for other Director reports. There were none.

**ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:38 p.m.

The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for July 15, 2025.



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President



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Secretary/Treasurer

**RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
OF THE RIO GRANDE WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

*(To Affirm the Resolution to Apply for a Loan from the  
Colorado Water Conservation Board)*

**R E C I T A L S**

WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District was created pursuant to section 37-48-102, C.R.S.; and,

WHEREAS, pursuant to section 37-48-108, C.R.S., the Rio Grande Water Conservation District is authorized to establish special improvement districts; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the request of certain water users in the Saguache Creek basin and section 37-48-123, the District filed a Petition to establish Special Improvement District No. 5 of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District (“Subdistrict No. 5”) in the District Court, Saguache County and the District approved said petition on December 18, 2017; and,

WHEREAS, Subdistrict No. 5 as a local government entity is authorized to establish a water enterprise pursuant to Article 45.1 of Title 37 of the Colorado Revised Statutes and Subdistrict No. 5 has established such enterprise; and,

WHEREAS, the Enterprise is authorized to borrow money and incur indebtedness pursuant to section 37-50-107(1)(c), C.R.S.; and,

WHEREAS, the Board of Managers of Subdistrict No. 5 previously directed Enterprise staff and consultants to pursue and apply for a loan from the Colorado Water Conservation Board in the amount of six million, ninety-three thousand, three hundred thirty dollars (\$6,093,330.00); and,

WHEREAS, the Board of Managers, after consultation with Enterprise Staff and consultants determined its current fee structure and revenue is sufficient to meet the repayment terms of such a loan; and,

WHEREAS, Enterprise staff and consultants did apply for such loan and such loan application was approved by the Colorado Water Conservation Board; and,

WHEREAS, the Enterprise Board has affirmed the request to apply for and approve such loan from the Colorado Water Conservation Board by written resolution; and,

WHEREAS, Subdistrict No. 5 and its water activity enterprise is a subset of the District itself and all contracts entered into by Subdistrict No. 5 and/or its water activity enterprise must be approved by the Board of Directors of the District.

**RESOLUTION**

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved by the Board of Directors of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District that:

1. The Subdistrict No. 5 Enterprise Board has previously authorized Enterprise staff and consultants to request a loan in the amount of six million, ninety-three thousand, three hundred thirty dollars (\$6,093,330.00).

2. The Board of Directors, acting for and on behalf of Subdistrict No. 5 and its water activity enterprise hereby accepts the terms of said loan as provided by the Colorado Water Conservation Board and authorizes the acceptance of the loan on behalf of the Enterprise.

RESOLVED this 15 day of April 2025, at the office of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, 8805 Independence Way, Alamosa, CO.

ATTEST:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE  
RIO GRANDE WATER CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT



Secretary



President

**RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
OF THE RIO GRANDE WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

*(To Affirm the Resolution to Apply for a Loan from the  
Colorado Water Conservation Board)*

**RECITALS**

WHEREAS, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District was created pursuant to section 37-48-102, C.R.S.; and,

WHEREAS, pursuant to section 37-48-108, C.R.S., the Rio Grande Water Conservation District is authorized to establish special improvement districts; and,

WHEREAS, pursuant to the request of certain water users in the Rio Grande Alluvium Response Area and section 37-48-123, the District filed a Petition to establish Special Improvement District No. 2 of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District ("Subdistrict No. 2") in the District Court, Rio Grande and Alamosa Counties, and the District approved said petition on March 1, 2016; and,

WHEREAS, Subdistrict No. 2 as a local government entity is authorized to establish a water enterprise pursuant to Article 45.1 of Title 37 of the Colorado Revised Statutes and Subdistrict No. 2 has established such enterprise; and,

WHEREAS, the Enterprise is authorized to borrow money and incur indebtedness pursuant to section 37-48-105(1)(c), C.R.S.; and,

WHEREAS, the Board of Managers of Subdistrict No. 2 previously directed Enterprise staff and consultants to pursue and apply for a loan from the Colorado Water Conservation Board in the amount of seven hundred twenty-three thousand one hundred sixty-dollar (\$723,160.00) and,

WHEREAS, the Board of Managers, after consultation with Enterprise Staff and consultants determined its current fee structure and revenue is sufficient to meet the repayment terms of such a loan; and,

WHEREAS, Enterprise staff and consultants did apply for such loan and such loan application was approved by the Colorado Water Conservation Board; and,

WHEREAS, the Enterprise Board has affirmed the request to apply for and approve such loan from the Colorado Water Conservation Board by written resolution; and,

WHEREAS, Subdistrict No. 2 and its water activity enterprise is a subset of the District itself and all contracts entered into by Subdistrict No. 2 and/or its water activity enterprise must be approved by the Board of Directors of the District.

**RESOLUTION**

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved by the Board of Directors of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District that:

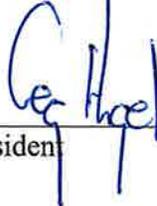
1. The Subdistrict No. 2 Enterprise Board has previously authorized Enterprise staff and consultants to request a loan in the amount of seven hundred twenty-three thousand one hundred sixty-dollar (\$723,160.00).
2. The Board of Directors, acting for and on behalf of Subdistrict No. 2 and its water activity enterprise hereby accepts the terms of said loan as provided by the Colorado Water Conservation Board and authorizes the acceptance of the loan on behalf of the Enterprise.

RESOLVED this 15th day of April 2025, at the office of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, 8805 Independence Way, Alamosa, CO.

ATTEST:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE  
RIO GRANDE WATER CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT

  
Secretary

  
President

**Deputy General Manager's Report**  
**RGWCD Board of Director's Annual Meeting**  
**April 15, 2025**

Huge thank you to all the District's staff! Thank you to Crystal for stepping up and learning the groundwater measurement position. Thank you to Chris for assisting Crystal in this task as well. Thank you to Linda for helping Quinton get his feet under him in his new position. Quinton has been doing a great job.

For the Deputy General Manager:

- Presentations/Classes/Conferences/Meetings
  - Master Irrigator Classes in January and February
  - Annual Ag Conference
  - Law of the Rio Grande
  - Colorado Water Congress Winter Session
  - National Water Resources Association (NWRA)
  - Rio Grande State of the Basin Symposium
  - Colorado State University Groundwater Symposium
  - Arkansas Basin Symposium
  - Annie's Project with CSU Extension
  - Round Table Tours
  - Testified to Colorado House Agriculture, Water and Natural Resources Committee in regards to HB25-1115 Water Supply Measurement and Forecasting Program
  - Newspaper articles on District Issues
  - Roundtable Chair
  - Wetlands Focus Area Committee
  - Rio Grande Water Users Association
  - San Luis Valley Irrigation Well Owners
  - Conejos Water Conservancy District
  
- Continue to assist Quinton, Angelo, Chris, Rose and Linda when needed with Subdistrict Programs for sustainability and replacement water needs. Attend Subdistrict BOM meetings when able. Have assisted with a number of unusual appeals for Subdistrict 1.
  
- Working with Kylie and CPS HR Consulting on Human Resource Project for the District (job analysis review, job description updates, handbook revisions, policy updates, etc.) Thank you to Kylie for being a major part of this effort. Trying to meet with staff on a one-to-one basis monthly when able.
  
- Working with Wylie on the SB22-028 Program.
  
- Working with Kylie on the annual audit process. We are close to being able to submit information to Wall, Smith and Bateman in the very near future.
  
- Continue the Garage/Workshop Build Project. Wylie has been the lead in this process and has done a great job in the design process.
  
- Working with our legal counsel on a number of cases:
  - Navajo Development Change Case completed
  - CBP Diligence
  - Lovato Augmentation
  - Subdistrict No. 1 4<sup>th</sup> POWM
  - SWAG Augmentation Plan
  - City of Alamosa

- City of Monte Vista
  - TX v. NM & CO
- Held the annual Closed Basin Project Allocation Meeting. The group voted to keep the split of the production at 60% Rio Grande and 40% Conejos. Conejos has a 0% curtailment in 2025, so there is an option to credit an additional amount to the Rio Grande should the group choose later in the year.
- Meet with Colorado Open Lands on potential opportunities for Groundwater Conservation Easements
- Attend meetings regarding the Airborne Snow Observatory flights for the Basin.
- Participate on the Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center Advisory Council at Adams State University
- Participating in the weekly State Affairs Committee with Colorado Water Congress
- Participate in the Dredge and Fill Rulemaking Process with CDPHE and others from the Valley
- Continue to work with Steering Committee of the Rio Grande Cooperative Project (BOR WaterSmart Grant).
- Working with group concerning Soil Conservation programs on dry up parcels in the SLV - includes folks from the soil conservation districts, CSU Extension, our District and others
- Participating in PRT Meetings on RGDSS Model updates and Response Function development.
- Work regarding District's groundwater monitoring networks—Clinton, Wylie and Willem have been assisting with this effort.
- Met with Rep. Hurd and his staff regarding Valley issues.
- Continue to push to get the IRA Funding announced back in January. Over \$18 million was included for San Luis Valley projects under the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District, Rio Grande Water Conservation District, Conejos Water Conservancy District and the Rio Grande Headwaters restoration Project.
- Rio Grande Compact Meeting in Alamosa on April 25, 2025 beginning at 9:00 a.m. at RGWCD Office. A reception will be held April 24<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. at The Vistas at Adams State University.
- Continue to meet with members of the public related to water issues in the Valley and the State

## Subdistrict #1 PROGRAM MANAGER'S REPORT

### Current Business

- Completed the Annual Report and submitted to DWR on 02/28/2025
- Have collected 73/80 fallow contracts with 7 of the originally accepted having withdrawn their contracts
  - Many withdrawn contracts were entered into prevent plant
  - The 73 returned contracts have a 5 year average diversion of 11,245 AF and have a proposed reduction of 10,232 AF
- Collecting and finalizing information on the 3 contracts for the well purchase program
  - The 3 contracts retire 4 wells with an annual average diversion of 730 AF
- Collected and reviewed data for the completion of the 2025 ARP (ARP is completed, as presented on 4/11/2025)
- Have completed field visits on Subdistrict No. 1 owned properties in preparation for 2025 irrigation season

## Subdistrict No. 2, No. 3, and No. 6 Program Manager Notes for RGWCD Board of Directors Quarterly Meeting on 04/15/2025

### Planned 2025 Activities

- All
  - Continue to look for opportunities to purchase and/or lease water rights to replace annual and post-plan injurious depletion obligations.
  - RGDSS Phase 7 Model and the Peer Review Team (“PRT”)
    - Response Functions (“RF”): Phase 7 RGDSS model RFs. They need to be published for public comment by May 27th and finalized/ready to use by July 1, 2025 in order for them to be utilized in the 2026 ARPs. If the RFs are not finalized by July 1 then the SDs will use the Phase 6 RFs for the 2026 ARPs.
    - La Jara Creek depletions: With the Phase 7 model, there’s a significant chance that SD3 and SD6 will owe depletions to La Jara Creek during the irrigation season. If this ends up being the case, the SDs need to strategize on how it will remedy those stream depletions through a combination of wet water and forbearance agreements.
  - Secure as many long-term Forbearance Agreements as possible.
  - With the Trinchera SD, participate in SLVIWO’s Taos Valley No. 3 SWSP.
- Subdistrict No. 2 (“SD2”) and Subdistrict No. 6 (“SD6”), Twin Pines Water Rights - Work with Director/Manager Deacon to utilize 140 AF of HCU for the 2025 irrigation season.
- Subdistrict No. 3 (“SD3”) and SD6
  - Both SDs continue to look for opportunities to purchase groundwater rights and/or implement programs to achieve/maintain a sustainable confined aquifer within their respective Subdistrict boundaries. Both SDs have implemented a Pumping Reduction Program for the 2025 irrigation season.
  - Working with Trinchera Subdistrict to operate a Lease/Fallow program on the Los Sauces ditch system for the 2025 ARP year.

Subdistrict No. 2 (SD2), Navajo’s Williams Creek Squaw Pass Diversion water rights purchase: SD2 and Navajo are in the final stages of this purchase. The Court entered the final decree in the Navajo case on 12/27/24 and CWCB approved the loan on 3/20/2025. The next steps are as follows;

1. Obtain a Resolution from the BODs that affirms that they approved applying for the loan.
2. Submit any remaining outstanding documents required by the CWCB in order to disburse the loan funds.
  - a. RGWCD-executed contract documents
    - i. Signature page
    - ii. Promissory note
    - iii. Board resolutions
      1. BOM
      2. BOD
    - iv. Security agreement
  - b. Valuation

3. Once the date is known for when the funds will be disbursed, coordinate with Navajo on a closing date.
4. Once purchase has been closed on, work with Navajo and the USFS to transfer the special use permit into the RGWCD's name.
5. Meet with Navajo and the water commissioner to plan out how to run this water right for the benefit of SD2 and non-SD users during the 2025 irrigation season.
6. Subcontract out the work of
  - a. Administering the water right during the irrigations season, and
  - b. Maintaining the ditch and infrastructure outside of the irrigation season.

### SD3

- Alpha Hay Farms Fields 11 and 12 in Antonito
  - Property maintenance and improvements to maximize the operational efficiency of the well and recharge pond.
    - Well rehabilitation: The well has been rehabilitated and is working much better. There was a new pump installed that will use much less power but allow us the flexibility to use it for Alpha SWSP purposes as well as the potential augmentation of other wells nearby.
    - Fence installation around Tract 1 (District managed property used for augmentation): This is nearing completion.
    - Recharge pond maintenance work: This has been completed for the 2025 irrigation season.
    - Source and install telemetry devices to facilitate the automation and remote operation of the well.
  - Water Court: With the SWSP limit of 5 years, we will need to take the water right through court in the next 2 years.
  - Continue to try and sell ~35 acre tracts 4 - 7 @ \$2,000/acre.
  - CWCB Loan: Need to make the final payment request by April 2026 and start making loan payments thereafter.
- Sandoval Land and Water Rights Purchase
  - Trying to determine how to get the most benefit out of the land and water that was purchased.
  - El Coda Ditch Shares: Negotiating a permanent forbearance agreement with the ditch shareholders.
- Sowards well purchase for sustainability purposes
  - Will inactivate it for the foreseeable future.
  - Need to disconnect the power and transfer the account to the RGWCD.

### SD6

- Working on implementing a Collaborative Water Sharing Agreement/SWSP on the Alamosa River for the 2026 irrigation season.
- Working on implementing the MVC SWSP for the 2026 irrigation season.
- Operate Rodney Reinhardt's Alamosa Creek Canal SWSP for a 3rd straight year.

- **USFWS Participation Contract for the 2026 ARP year: Formalize how the USFWS will insure that it pays/covers its depletion in full by giving the water it gives SD6 a mutually agreed upon value.**

Board of Directors

**RE: April 15, 2025 Board of Director's Subdistricts No. 4 and No. 5 Update**

Board,

Here is a brief update on Subdistrict operations for Subdistrict No. 4 and Subdistrict No. 5.

#### Subdistrict No. 4

The main focus of Subdistrict No. 4 has been the Bowman property Land Transition Plan. The Land Transition Plan outlines the initial approach to revegetating the property. In 2025, three quarters are in the third year of revegetation, three quarters are in the second year of revegetation, and three more will begin the first year of revegetation. The three remaining quarters are being leased for forage crop production.

In 2025, Subdistrict No. 4 will be looking to secure a source of water to remedy injurious depletions on San Luis Creek. They intend to use the water rights acquired through the purchase of the Bowman property as a source of augmentation water. The subdistrict is just now beginning to focus on this issue and staff have been exploring ways to make this option work.

#### Subdistrict No. 5

The pending response function changes showed additional replacement water will be needed on Saguache Creek. Since the Subdistrict No. 5 and BOD had approved entering into the contract to purchase the water rights to four North Star quarters. The owner has asked for some revisions to the contract that require some additional evaluation and consultation with DWR. The total price is unchanged at \$3,400,000.00 or \$850,000.00 per quarter. This is the same price the previous five quarters have been purchased for. If this transaction is completed, the subdistricts will have acquired nine quarters from North Star Farm. From what we know of the current model updates, this water, along with the Hazard water rights, should provide enough water to remedy the injurious stream depletions to Saguache Creek from Subdistrict No.'s 1, 4, and 5. The next challenge is securing enough capacity to deliver the higher rates of injurious depletions that occur in wet years.

Subdistrict No. 5 has passed a resolution affirming their desire to enter into the contract with the CWCB for a loan totaling \$6,093,330.00 to cover the costs of acquiring the water rights and drilling up to three augmentation wells. The Subdistrict asks that the BOD approve their resolution accepting the terms of the loan, so they can move forward with the loan.

On the Sheppard easement, construction of the access road was completed in February. The well driller is scheduled to be on site this week to begin the augmentation well. For power the REC contract is complete and paid for, we are waiting for them to schedule the construction of the line.

I am always happy to address any questions you have whether at the meeting or not.

Sincerely,

Chris

		ratified at an election conducted in the same manner as required when issuing bonds. This bill increases these thresholds to \$400,000 and \$650,000 respectively. On July 1, 2029, and every five years thereafter, these amounts are increased by the rate of inflation.		
<u>SB 25-283</u>	<u>Dylan Roberts</u> <u>Cleave Simpson</u> <u>Karen McCormick</u>	<p><b>Funding Water Conservation Board Projects</b></p> <p>In FY 2025-26, the bill allocates money for water projects as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appropriates a total of \$24,280,000 from the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) Construction Fund to the CWCB in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for specified water-related projects;</li> <li>• appropriates \$29,200,000 from the Water Plan Implementation Cash Fund to the DNR;</li> <li>• transfers up to \$2.0 million from the CWCB Construction Fund to restore the balance in the Litigation Fund for legal issues related to water compact compliance;</li> <li>• transfers \$500,000 from the CWCB Construction Fund to the Plant Health, Pest Control, and Environmental Protection Cash Fund and appropriates the funds to the Department of Agriculture;</li> <li>• authorizes the CWCB to make a loan in an amount of \$12,978,500 from the Severance Tax Perpetual Base Cash Fund to the North Poudre Irrigation Company to support the Park Creek Reservoir Expansion Project; and</li> <li>• eliminates the Office of Water Conservation in the DNR, transfers all responsibilities to the CWCB, and transfers any remaining funds in the Water Efficiency Grant Program Cash Fund to the Severance Tax Perpetual Base Fund.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, in FY 2025-26, the bill makes the following transfers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• up to \$2.0 million from the CWCB Construction Fund to the CWCB Litigation Fund;</li> <li>• \$500,000 from the CWCB Construction Fund to the Plant Health, Pest Control, and Environmental Protection Cash Fund; and</li> <li>• any remaining funds in the Water Efficiency Grant Program Cash Fund to the Severance Tax Perpetual Base Fund (exact amount not estimated).</li> </ul>	Senate, Apr 10, 2025: Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources refer Unamended to Finance	

15 bills

		<p>align river recreation efforts with existing water management strategies;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Align river recreation management with state and regional water planning efforts regarding conservation to address the impact of climate change on aquatic ecosystems;</li> <li>- Identify high-priority rivers and recreation areas to support improvements;</li> <li>- Enhance river data collection, mapping, and public access to information; and</li> <li>- Promote river safety and stewardship opportunities through initiatives such as hazard removal, signage improvements, and collaborative partnerships.</li> </ul> <p>Under current law, the parks and wildlife commission is responsible for establishing a state trails system. The bill requires the division to consult and cooperate with appropriate entities to establish a nonmotorized and a year-round motorized trails program to support the planning, development, and stewardship of trail systems that are designed for nonmotorized and motorized use, respectively. The division is required to establish and operate the nonmotorized and motorized trails programs in a manner that protects, preserves, enhances, and manages the natural, scenic, and recreation areas of the state.</p>		
HJR 25- 1004	Karen McCormick Ty Winter Dylan Roberts	<p><b>Water Project Eligibility Lists</b></p> <p>This is the annual resolution to approve water project revolving fund eligibility lists administered by the Colorado water resources and power development authority.</p>	Feb 27, 2025: Governor Signed	
SB 25- 040	Dylan Roberts Cleave Simpson Karen McCormick	<p><b>Future of Severance Taxes &amp; Water Funding Task Force</b></p> <p>The bill creates the Future of Severance Taxes and Water Funding Task Force in DNR. The 9-member task force will hire a contractor to conduct a study and develop recommendations. The contractor must explore options to continue funding water needs for the state while severance tax revenue is expected to decrease. Appointments to the task force must be made by September 1, 2025. The contractor must submit a draft report to the task force by January 15, 2026, and a final report from the task force is due to the Water Resources and Agriculture Review committee by July 15, 2026.</p>	April 11, 2025: Senate Appropriations refer to Committee of the Whole	
SB 25- 137	Cleave Simpson	<p><b>Greenhouse Gas Credits for Water Quality Projects</b></p> <p>The bill allows water quality green infrastructure projects, upon third-party certification of greenhouse gas emissions savings, to receive greenhouse gas credits that they can trade through the credit accounting and trading system operated by the Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE).</p>	Senate, Mar 5, 2025: Senate Committee on Transportation & Energy Postpone Indefinitely	
SB 25- 140	Rod Pelton Dusty Johnson	<p><b>Irrigation Districts Inflation Adjustments</b></p> <p>The bill increases the statutory rate of daily pay for directors and election judges of a Water Conservation and Irrigation District from \$100 to \$150. Under current law, contracts entered by the directors of a water district between \$250,000 and \$400,000 are non-binding unless ratified by at least one-third of the voters in the district, and contracts in excess of \$400,000 are non-binding unless</p>	executive, Apr 7, 2025: Governor Signed	

HB 25- 1106	<a href="#">Larry Don Suckla</a>	<p><b>Remove Precipitation Collection Limitations</b></p> <p>The bill removes limitations on the collection and use of rainwater from residential rooftops.</p>	Feb 13, 2025: House Committee on Energy & Environment Postpone Indefinitely	
HB 25- 1113	<a href="#">Lesley Smith</a> <a href="#">Karen McCormick</a> <a href="#">Dylan Roberts</a>	<p><b>Limit Turf in New Residential Development</b></p> <p>Under current law, a local government is prohibited from using nonfunctional turf or invasive plants in any new or redeveloped government property beginning January 1, 2026. This bill expands the prohibition to include residential property used for apartment or condominium housing. No later than January 1, 2028, local governments must enact or amend ordinances to limit the installation of nonfunctional turf in for all residential real property.</p>	Apr 6, 2025: House Considered Senate Amendments - Result was to Laid Over Daily	
HB 25- 1115	<a href="#">Julie McCluskie</a> <a href="#">Matt Soper</a> <a href="#">Dylan Roberts</a>	<p><b>Water Supply Measurement &amp; Forecasting Program</b></p> <p>The bill authorizes the CWCB to administer a water supply measurement and forecasting program to collect and disseminate data on snowpack levels, investigate technological advances in snowpack measurement and water supply forecasting, and collect other data that the board determines will assist in those efforts. For the 2025-26 state fiscal year, \$104,608 is appropriated to DNR from the Colorado water conservation board construction fund for the department to implement the bill. Of the money appropriated, \$15,960 is reappropriated to the office of the governor for use by the office of information technology to provide information technology services for the department.</p>	April 11, 2025: Senate Appropriations refer to Committee of the Whole	
HB 25- 1311	<a href="#">Julie McCluskie</a> <a href="#">Matt Soper</a> <a href="#">Dylan Roberts</a>	<p><b>Deductions for Net Sports Betting Proceeds</b></p> <p>As approved by voters in 2019, a tax of 10% is imposed on net sports betting proceeds. Under current law, for the purpose of calculating its net sports betting proceeds, a sports betting operator or internet sports betting operator is allowed to deduct all payments to players, all federal excise taxes paid, and a certain percentage of free bets placed by players. Beginning on September 1, 2025, the bill removes the deduction for all free bets placed.</p>	Mar 28, 2025: Introduced In House - Assigned to Finance	
HB 25- 1323	<a href="#">Meghan Lukens</a> <a href="#">Rick Taggart</a> <a href="#">Dylan Roberts</a>	<p><b>Division of Parks &amp; Wildlife Outdoor Recreation</b></p> <p>The bill clarifies that the division of parks and wildlife is the primary entity responsible for outdoor recreation management and infrastructure planning in the state. The bill requires the division to support the planning, development, and maintenance of infrastructure and access projects to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities in the state. In doing so, the division is required to balance and integrate outdoor recreation efforts with statewide conservation efforts. In collaboration with federal, local, and tribal partners, the division is tasked with developing regional outdoor recreation and conservation plans that will, among other endeavors, consider sustainable and climate-resilient strategies for outdoor recreation and conservation planning and employ data-driven management of public lands and regional outdoor recreational resources. The bill also requires the division to develop a river recreation program. To implement the river recreation program, the division is required to, in collaboration with the Colorado water conservation board, the outdoor recreation industry office, and other state agencies or stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build a statewide coalition of river recreation, stewardship, and safety managers;</li> <li>- Coordinate with river basin roundtables, local governments, and other appropriate stakeholders to</li> </ul>	<p>Apr 4, 2025: Introduced In House - Assigned to Agriculture, Water &amp; Natural Resources</p> <p>Hearing: April 14, 2025 1:30 p.m.</p>	

# Rio Grande Water Conservation District

## Bill Tracker

April 11, 2025

Bills	Sponsors	Title	Last Action	Position
<a href="#">HB 25-1009</a>	<a href="#">Tisha Mauro</a> <a href="#">Junie Joseph</a> <a href="#">Lisa Cutter</a>	<p><b>Vegetative Fuel Mitigation</b></p> <p>The bill allows a fire protection district or a metropolitan district that provides fire prevention services to establish a program requiring the removal of dead or dry plant material from private property that can burn and contribute to a fire, including leaves, grass, shrubs, ground litter, dead leaves, and fallen pine needles. The program must adopt policies consistent with the 2024 International Wildland-Urban Interface Code or a subsequent code, or the standards and codes adopted by the Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code Board. A district may assess a fine for owners and occupiers of private property that fail to remove vegetative fuel from the property at least ten days after a second written notice. The fine must be approximately equal to the cost of removing the vegetative fuel, must not exceed \$300 per incident, and is waived if the vegetative fuel is removed within 10 days of a fine assessment. Districts must use fine revenue only to remove vegetative fuel on private property, and must prioritize use of the money to assist with vegetative-fuel removal for low-income, single, senior, or disabled owners and occupiers. A district cannot assess a lien on any private property until there are five or more unpaid fines for violations concerning the property. The bill also requires districts to establish a process for owners and occupiers of private property to protest a fine, and requires districts to adopt rules and policies for a vegetative fuel mitigation program only after public notice and comment. Amendments were added to the bill to exempt agricultural land, land owned by a public utility that has a vegetation management or wildfire mitigation plan and land adjacent to a ditch that conveys decreed water rights.</p>	<p>Mar 31, 2025: Governor Signed</p>	
<a href="#">HB 25-1014</a>	<a href="#">Dusty Johnson</a> <a href="#">Meghan Lukens</a> <a href="#">Dylan Roberts</a>	<p><b>Increasing Efficiency Division of Water Resources</b></p> <p>The bill modifies procedures and fees for permitting groundwater use, and the timing of a decennial report on abandoned water rights by the Division of Water Resources. The bill also staggers the preparation of the abandoned rights list, requiring that the division engineer prepare the next decennial list for water divisions 1, 2, and 3 by July 1, 2030, and for water divisions 4, 5, 6, and 7 by July 1, 2035, and then every ten years thereafter.</p>	<p>April 11, 2025: Senate Appropriations refer to Committee of the Whole</p>	
<a href="#">HB 25-1099</a>	<a href="#">Tisha Mauro</a> <a href="#">Rick Taggart</a> <a href="#">Nick Hinrichsen</a>	<p><b>Water Quality Data Standards</b></p> <p>This bill required the Water Quality Control Commission to issue written guidance on total maximum daily load development, including recommendations on data collection, analytic methods, data quality assurance, and accuracy. Total maximum daily load refers to the amount of pollution in a body of water. By January 1, 2028, CDPHE was required to determine a total maximum daily load for state waters and use this standard for pollutant permits. These standards must include data collected within the last five years and relevant historic data.</p>	<p>Mar 6, 2025: House Committee on Energy &amp; Environment Postpone Indefinitely</p>	

# Bureau of Reclamation Report to the RGWCD

April 15, 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 03/31/2025)

A total of 605 AF was delivered to the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge through CHO1 & 2.

A total of 174 AF was delivered to the Blanca Wildlife Habitat Area through CHO3 & 4.

Delivery to the Rio Grande has been 1,924 AF.

San Luis Lake has water at an Elevation of 7509.4 ft.

### San Luis Lake (1/1/2025 to 3/31/2025)

San Luis Lake	San Luis Lake Elevation .....	7509.4 ft. MSL
	Storage .....	113 acre-feet
	TDS .....	N/A ppm TDS

### Project Deliveries: (1/1/2025 to 3/31/2025)

Deliveries to:	Rio Grande—total.....	1,924** acre-feet
	Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge—total.....	605* acre-feet
	Blanca Wildlife Habitat Area—total.....	174* acre-feet
	San Luis Lake—total.....	0.0 acre-feet
	Head Lake (West).....	0.0 acre-feet
	<b>Total Deliveries as of March 31, 2025.....</b>	<b>2,703** acre-feet</b>

*\*\*Preliminary totals subject to review*

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

*\*Includes 103 AF exchange Shaw Reservoir water delivered to BLM*

## **MAINTENANCE BRANCH**

Well rehabilitation operations were completed for 4 salvage wells to date in 2025. Weed management continued at canal check structures. Blade work continued on lateral roads and canal berms. Preventative maintenance on project features is ongoing.

## **WATER LABORATORY**

A total of 305 samples were collected from the Closed Basin Project during the period of January 1, 2025, through March 31, 2025.

Total Dissolved Solids at the Outlet was an average of 282 mg/L for the period.

## Peachwood Farms Land Transition Plan

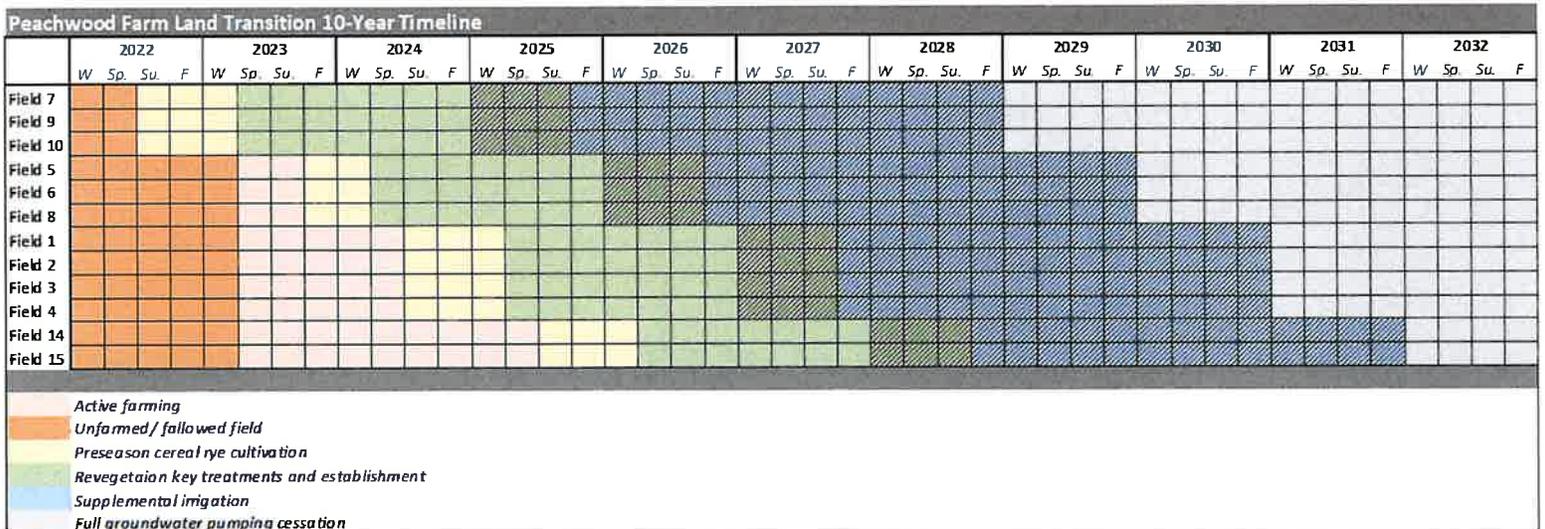
and emergence over approximately 3 weeks. For establishment, subsequent irrigations will be applied as needed based on seasonal precipitation. Irrigations, as recommended, will continue through late fall. It is estimated that 11 inches total will be required during the growing season for establishment of the perennial crop. Total irrigation in the establishment year must not exceed 18 inches or 180 acre-feet. Weeds should be mechanically controlled in August. This practice will reduce water use and prime the field for subsequent re-seeding, if necessary, the following spring.

### **Revegetation Years 2-3**

If necessary, targeted no-till-drill re-seeding will occur in April of years 2 and 3 during the land transition. To sustain the perennial vegetation and promote sustained establishment, an estimated 4 inches of irrigation will be applied during the growing season, based on seasonal precipitation and vegetation response. Weeds should be mechanically controlled if needed early (June-July) but before Fourwing salt brush is 12 inches tall.

### **Land Transition Years 4-10**

Based on the establishment of ecologic communities during the first three years of the land transition additional measures and treatment should be considered to promote long-term habitat resiliency. Measures may include supplementing seasonal precipitation with irrigation, soil amendments, re-seeding, ongoing weed control of Canada thistle, etc. COL and the Subdistrict recognize the significant uncertainty during this period and remain committed to an adaptive management philosophy with the goals of groundwater pumping cessation, reestablishing ecological processes, and promoting landscape resilience. While the land transition is considered complete at the end of 10 years, the overarching goals of this project will extend to the Deed of Conservation Easement and development of a long-term land management plan referenced therein.



**Rio Grande National Forest Report**  
**for the Board of Directors April 2025 Quarterly Meeting**

Amber Lidell, Hydrologist

This report serves as a January - April 2025 update for the board of directors.

The two new Watershed Restoration Action Plans (WRAP) are underway as a part of the Rio Chama Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program. Some of these watersheds (Toltec Creek-Rio de Los Pinos and Bighorn Creek) share land with both Colorado and New Mexico (both the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF) and the Carson National Forest). These watersheds will be developed with the adjacent East Fork Brazos watershed in the same WRAP, while collaborating with the Carson NF. The East Fork Brazos Watershed is not on RGNF land, but has been added to the collaborative WRAP. The other two watersheds (Sheep Creek- Conejos River and Headwaters Rio de Los Pinos, teal shading below) lie on the Rio Grande National Forest and will be developed together in a different WRAP.

Essential projects are nearly finished being planned that are expected to improve the health of these five watersheds. The project development is happening for both Action Plans in tandem. Writing is expected to begin next week for both action plans in tandem, with priority given to the collaborative WRAP that is being written with the Carson NF. Monitoring of the watersheds will be done using our already developed Watershed Condition Framework as well as targeted monitoring above and below watershed projects.

Priority and Focal HUC 12 Watersheds within the Rio Chama CFLRP



Aquatic organism passage (AOP) projects (both projects below are part of the WRAPs and the Rio Chama CFLRP described on the previous page):

1. Data analysis work is nearly complete for the road-stream crossing of FSR 117 and Cumbres Creek on the Conejos Peak Ranger District. A structure type will be selected in late April 2025 (30% design) and the remaining design work will be in the hands of the RGNF Engineering Program starting in May 2025. The geotechnical survey for this crossing is 'planned' for this summer, but contracting is currently frozen for this, so it is up in the air.
2. Survey work for the Rio de Los Pinos FSR 131 crossing is planned for this fall.

Over-Snow Vehicle (OSV) Travel Management update:

1. The RGNF is working on finalizing maps of each alternative for each Ranger District. Once maps are finalized, specialists will begin analysis.

3D Hydrography Program (3DHP) Watershed Prioritization and Data Acquisition:

1. The RGNF is gathering information on HUC 10 and/or HUC 8 watershed data acquisition prioritization for the 3D Hydrography Program (3DHP) that will be replacing the National Hydrography Dataset (NHD) over the next several years. This highly accurate water body data will not automatically become updated, as it will require funding to acquire. The RGNF has been working with the USGS, and the Forest Service 3DHP working group. The RGNF would like to partner with another Upper Rio Grande River Basin group to select priority HUCs (watersheds) for data acquisition to replace the NHD, and we are interested in hearing which watersheds would be of most interest for other groups to prioritize.
2. This topic will likely be presented to a roundtable this fall 2025 or winter 25-26, as the RGNF is looking for partners for this work. **If other agencies or board members in the Rio Grande Basin also have interest in acquiring this data sooner than later, please contact Amber Lidell at [amber.lidell@usda.gov](mailto:amber.lidell@usda.gov)**

CPW funds have been sent from the 2024 CPW Wetland Grant for the Willow Creek Watershed Restoration Project. The grant agreement between CPW and the group planning to receive the grant is not yet complete. The RGNF was unable to receive the grant due to a recent federal grant freeze, but the Forest hopes to have one of our partners receive the funds for this work.

Work for the Willow Creek Watershed Restoration Project recently completed or underway:

1. A field trip with Saguache Ranger District silviculture and trails specialists to the Wilcox Gulch project area. Decisions from this field trip included:
  - a. There is a need to remove the culvert at the Willow Lake Trail-Wilcox Gulch stream crossing, as this culvert is undersized by ~6 feet, and could be contributing to the erosion and downcutting observed at Wilcox Gulch. The culvert will be replaced by a low water crossing with rock-armored banks.
  - b. The mycelium treatment proposes to use mushrooms observed to be growing on dead wood in Wilcox Gulch, which would then be spread to small piles of other dead wood in Wilcox Gulch without mushrooms visually present. Black plastic would be used to cover these areas and increase heat for about 3 months, and the plastic would be removed before the snow flies. No mycelium treatment would occur on live trees. This is planned for either this summer or next summer and will be scoped to the public in the next upcoming SOPA update.
  - c. Small Juniper saplings are encroaching on the riparian area. These are proposed to be cut and used to build LTPBR structures this summer.
2. The 2025 water sampling plan for Willow Creek and Copper Creek has been expanded. More parameters will be analyzed by the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Fort Collins, CO. The R8 EPA lab out of Denver will still be providing total and dissolved copper water quality analysis, as well as water hardness. The data will be input into the Copper Biotic Ligand Model (BLM) to determine Copper toxicity levels at Willow Creek and Copper Creek. Water Sampling is proposed to begin on July 30, 2025, and would be complete by late September 2025. We hope to use this data as more of a baseline for water quality in this area. The RGNF hopes to collect more post-implementation water quality samples in 2026.
3. Geologic and hydrogeologic mapping of the watershed is underway. Digital elevation and imagery mapping of the watershed is underway, including analysis of stream stats flow models of the watershed.
4. Mapping of location and type of low-tech process-based structure along Wilcox Creek is underway – the structures will include a combination of structures to encourage proper step-pool formation, BDAs, PALS, and dropping logs in place (those that are hanging above the stream).

Multiple Beaver Dam Analogue (BDA) structures have been installed at multiple locations across the forest. Beavers have also been reintroduced in multiple locations. There is a strong monitoring program that follows this work. This work has been completed with many partners, including Rio Grande Headwaters, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, CPW, TU, and others. Army Corps of Engineers has expressed their preference to see nationwide permit 27 pre-construction notices (PCNs) for all projects involving BDA structure installations. Our Fisheries Biologist is working on putting together a lumped PCN for BDA installations planned at the Middle Fork of Carnero Creek, Osier Creek, Houselog Creek, Decker Creek, Wilcox Gulch, Willow Creek, and Copper Gulch. For more information or specifics on locations, please contact our Forest Wildlife and Fisheries Program Manager, Jason Remshardt, at [william.remshardt@usda.gov](mailto:william.remshardt@usda.gov)

## **RGWCD Memorandum (Informational)**

### **Update on Colorado's Upper Rio Grande Water Cooperative Project**

In 2021, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD) received grants from the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) and the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART program to explore the development of a basin-wide water market. This initiative aims to enhance water efficiency and encourage conservation by facilitating water trades among users in the basin. The Rio Grande Water Conservation District and a team of partners have been working to develop tools to support a local, in-basin water market/ trading platform/strategy to:

- Secure water within the Basin
- Sustain as much agriculture as possible
- Replace approximately 16,000+ acre-feet of annual stream depletions
- Benefit the overall watershed health and wildlife habitat
- Provide new and more flexible water use options within our Basin

At the beginning of the project, the team composed of Western Water Partnerships, BBA Water Engineers, Davis Engineering, Hill and Robbins PC, WestWater Research, and Rio de la Vista convened a Steering Committee to help oversee the effort. The Steering Committee included representatives from Colorado Open Lands, Trout Unlimited, Colorado Water Conservation Board, San Luis Valley WCD, Conejos WCD, and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Though a series of outreach efforts with the Subdistricts' members, the project team received feedback that several tools would be helpful in the development of an active water rights trading system to assist in the management of SLV groundwater resources. The project team has been developing the initial components of surface water and groundwater tools and an implementation plan outlining the components of a water rights accounting and trading platform. All of these would be integrated with each other and would have a map-based user interface (i.e., ESRI based geodatabase).

The project team anticipates that the work under this funding will be complete by July 2025 (Phase 1). A final report will be produced that will include an overview of the surface and ground water tools and the water rights trading implementation plan. To fully develop and implement the tools (i.e., surface and groundwater tools, a water rights accounting and trading platform, and geodatabase, a CWCB Water Plan Grant to fund Phase 2 is proposed and the team is developing an application to be submitted by July 1, 2025. It should be noted that a pre-application meeting was held with CWCB grant managers, where this proposal was viewed favorably. The main components of Phase 2 are provided below.

**Surface and Ground Water Tools--** BBA Water Consultants and Davis Engineering have developed prototypes of database tools for surface and ground water rights. These tools provide estimates of consumptive use credit associated with a potential fallow parcel by input of a parcel identification number and fallowed acres. Functionality also includes determination of surface water depletion reach based on surface water supply source and stream mile. Both engineering firms have been coordinating with each other to ensure the tool(s) are fully compatible with each other.

**Water Rights Accounting and Trading Platform--** An automated water accounting and trading platform is proposed to help subdistrict members and staff to monitor their surface water credits and

groundwater usage in (near) real time, connect lessors/sellers with lessees/buyers, and monitor and track transactions. It is proposed that the Water Rights Accounting and Trading Platform be focused on Subdistrict 1 considering its significant groundwater overdraft and the existing, informal surface water credit market. Following the pilot, the water market will expand to incorporate additional water resources and the other subdistricts. The trading component of the platform will facilitate the buying and selling of SWC through a web-based marketplace. To protect data privacy and security, only Farm Units within Subdistrict 1 will be authorized to create an account. Below is a high-level description of the capabilities being scoped for the Water Rights Accounting and Trading Platform.

### **Farm Unit Functions**

The accounting platform enables Farm Units to monitor their SWC and net groundwater withdrawal balance online, like checking a bank account balance. Specifically, the platform allows Farm Units to:

- View and manage their SWC and net groundwater withdrawal balance
- Upload meter readings directly into the system, reducing the burden on Subdistrict staff to manually collect groundwater pumping data from Farm Units
- Post offers to buy and sell water
- Track market metrics and activity

### **Subdistrict Staff Functions**

The platform will also include a manager dashboard and additional features for Subdistrict staff, allowing them to:

- Monitor and report groundwater usage across the entire Subdistrict
- Facilitate SWC transfers at the request of Farm Units
- Participate in the market as a seller or buyer of SWC.

### **Water Trading Features**

The primary goals of the Rosedale trading feature are to:

- Develop a fair and equitable water trading program that preserves farm communities and ecosystems.
- Enable eligible users to trade water in a relatively simple manner through the platform to maximize the value of the resource.
- Develop a trading feature that could be easily expanded to include other subdistricts and water assets
- Incorporates a simple bulletin board system is recommended for displaying offers to buy and sell water, where water users can post notices about water they need or have available for sale or lease. This method is cost-effective and efficient for communicating information.

### **Conclusion:**

The project team is working to close out this phase of the project (Phase 1) by July 2025. A final report will be prepared for the close-out in addition to a CWCB application for submittal by the July 1, 2025, deadline.