

# **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Watershed Management Planning Committee

DATE: May 14, 2018

SUBJECT: Summary of Watershed Management Planning Committee Meeting

## ***MISSION STATEMENT***

***The mission of the Watershed Management Planning Group (WMPG) is to help protect existing water uses and watershed health in the Upper Gunnison Basin in the face of pressure from increased water demands and permanent reductions in water supply.***

A meeting of the Watershed Management Planning (WMP) Committee was held on May 14, 2018 at 6:00 p.m.

George Sibley, Ashley Bembenek, Camille Richard, Jesse Kruthaupt, Dan Olson with NRCS, Bob Robbins, Molly McConnell, Tom Grant, Matt Feier with CBMR, Maddie Rehn with the Gunnison Public Land Initiative, Frank Kugel, John McClow, and Beverly Richards were in attendance.

George Sibley called the meeting to order.

## **Wilson Water Group Update**

Ashley Bembenek provided the Wilson Water Group update. She said Chris Kurtz is finishing up the reach maps with stakeholder issues included. The plan is to share these with the sub-basin coordinators and verify the information with input from stakeholders. The goal is to have these completed by the next committee meeting. Frank Kugel said he spoke with Erin Wilson and she mentioned there would be a personnel change as Katie Birch is leaving to work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Ashley also said Maddie Redden has accepted the intern position to help with the upcoming field work.

Ashley also provided an overview of assessment objectives. The assessment locations will be the Lake Fork, then East River and Ohio Creek, and finally Cebolla Creek in this first assessment phase. These will be tailored to the sub-basins and the identification of three different assessment areas: environmental flows, recreations flows, and agricultural and municipal water uses. The environmental flow recommendations will be on selected reaches to protect resources and that are consistent with natural hydrology. The recreational flow recommendations will be developed on selected reaches for whitewater kayaking, rafting, float-fishing, and stand-up paddle boarders. The agricultural and municipal portion of the assessment will include characterizing current water uses, identifying shortage locations, and using modeling tools to identify collaborative water management

strategies. George Sibley asked if areas of higher residential density (subdivisions) in otherwise agricultural areas would be given separate attention in the assessment. Ashley said these were not included in the scope of the project but in the case of multiple houses on one well, these could also be included.

The next phase of the assessment process will be data compilation which will include stakeholder input; the use of existing studies and reports; the use of water resource allocation models to identify natural, current, and projected flows; identification of reaches of concern; identification of reaches with high-quality conditions; and identification of data gaps. Ashley said once priority reaches are identified, the assessment process will then include additional modeling or flow analysis to determine flow shortages and evaluate potential alternative water management strategies. The field assessment work will then begin along with environmental analysis to determine stability on priority reaches. Once these items are completed the process will include additional stakeholder interviews conducted to address recreational, fishery, and mine reclamation issues. There will also be additional discussions with private landowners and from these options will be identified to develop solution to the issues.

### **Sub-Basin Coordinators Updates**

*Lake Fork and Cebolla* – Camille Richard said she has been working with the River Restoration Corridor group. This group is comprised of representatives from the LFVC, town trustees, county commissioners, and the Downtown Improvement and Revitalization Team. There will be a meeting on May 25<sup>th</sup> and she will provide a status report at the next committee meeting. She has also been working on the CWCB status report which is due on June 1<sup>st</sup>.

*Ohio Creek* – Jesse Kruthaupt said he has been working on the information requested from Camille for the status report. He has not been involved in many meetings with landowners but has been involved in phone conversations about low flow years. He is waiting on the model results to start stakeholder interviews again.

*East River* – Ashley Bembenek said they have been working with CBMR to assess the East River for the proposed Teo 2 ski resort expansion. The results of this assessment will be included in the final environmental impact statement. Matt Feier said they have been working with partners but decided to continue with the established NEPA process, but the partners will be included in the larger process.

### **NRCS and Possible Overlaps with WMP**

Dan Olson with NRCS gave a general overview of how they overlap with the watershed management process and how these two processes can become more collaborative. The NRCS offers technical and financial assistance to landowners for conservation projects. They have a wide breadth of capability as they have taken an aim to assist as many and as diverse customers as possible. These projects could also benefit and impact on the watershed level. This more focused approach will give

them the opportunity to help almost anyone but there is a limited amount of resources available. Dan said if they going to gain watershed scale improvements, the more focused approach is critical to make the impact they would like to achieve. Many of the NRCS offices are putting priority on irrigation improvement and efficiency. These will be prioritized through the ranking system and that process will be proposed again for this year. The focus will also be on all irrigated acreage in the Upper Gunnison, lower Gunnison, and Dolores watersheds. This is considered a critical component to focus strategies and develop a priority system. Dan said there is a real need for collaboration to make an effective contribution and ensure a more focused approach.

Dan said the funding sources available were all established through the Farm Bill. These sources include Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Regional Conservation Partner Project (RCPP). The EQUIP program addresses natural resource concerns and can provide benefits such as water quality, conservation, and improved habitat. The deadline for applications for EQUIP funds is late fall or early winter but there have been some delays due to engineering needs.

The CSP funding can be used for catastrophic events or to improve infrastructure or existing conservation systems. The RCPP works with partnerships to increase the sustainable use of resources on the watershed scale. These partnerships often include multiple landowners or ditch companies. This is a very competitive program as it is on the national level. Dan said there are some funds available at the state level and this is a less competitive program at that level.

### **Update on Draft CWCB Status Report**

Camille Richards submitted a draft report, but she still needs some information to include in the draft. She will be working on the financial aspects with Jill Steele. With regards to pilot projects, Camille said she had spoken with Chris Sturm and was told we can include existing projects that are not yet completed and completed projects that are relevant to this planning process even though completed prior to the WMP process. Examples of these include the Teachout-Fairchild Ditch project completed on Ohio Creek, the project completed by the Coal Creek Water Coalition on drinking water out of Coal Creek; the Gunsight Bridge project being done by the Crested Butte Land Trust and partially funded by the District; and the Huff Mine project on the headwaters of Henson Creek. These could also include educational and study tours to the project sights.

### **UPDATE ON SLATE RIVER ISSUES –**

Frank Kugel said the Slate River Working Group was developed as a partnership between the Town of Crested Butte and the Crested Butte Land Trust to identify challenges related to recreational use on the Slate River and how these affect landowners and agricultural water users. The inaugural meeting of the group will be held on Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>. Frank will report back to the District board and this committee at the next meeting.

## **Development of WMPG FAQs – 10 Common Questions**

Staff has only received a limited number of responses to this item. Committee members will provide their input by the end of the month so a list can be compiled for the next meeting.

## **Planning for Summer Events and WMPG Participation**

George said this item was included to discuss the participation of the WMPG in summer events throughout the valley. The District interns will represent the group at the Gunnison River Festival on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. This will be an education component included in the Kid's Zone and will also include the use of the water trailer. Molly McConnell said they are working on an educational piece for this event.

Other suggestions for event participation include a float in the Cattlemen's Day parade; booths at the town picnics in Crested Butte and Mt. Crested Butte; and a booth at Cattlemen's Day events; showing video at GCEA annual meeting; and the Wildflower Festival. Staff will contact the entities associated with these events to find out more information about participation.

## **Meeting Wrap-up and Action Items**

In preparation for the next meeting the following items were discussed:

- The next meeting for the Watershed Management Planning Committee will be June 11, 2018 beginning at 6:00 p.m.

Action items include:

- Reach maps to be completed prior to next meeting for review.
- Provide input to Camille Richard by May 21<sup>st</sup> on draft CWCB status report.
- Provide input for FAQs prior to next meeting.
- Staff will contact several summer events scheduled for information on UGRWCD participation with material from the WMPG.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.