

MEMORANDUM

TO: UGRWCD Board Members

FROM: Taylor Local Users Group (TLUG)

DATE: March 10, 2021

SUBJECT: Taylor Local Users Group Meeting Minutes

A TLUG meeting was held on March 10, 2020 via Zoom video/teleconference. Attending the meeting were the following TLUG members:

Ryan Birdsey, representative for flat water recreation interests
Ernie Cockrell, representative for Taylor Placer
Pete Dunda, representative for property owners
Roark Kiklevich, representative for wade fishing interests
Don Sabrowski, UGRWCD Board representative and TLUG Chair
Mark Schumacher, representative for whitewater recreation interests
Andy Spann, representative for irrigation interests

Also present: Steve Anders (USGS); Rory Birdsey; Patrick Blackdale (Three Rivers Resort Outfitting); Ryan Christianson (BOR); Erik Knight (BOR); Jesse Kruthaupt (Trout Unlimited); Kestrel Kunz (American Whitewater); Dan Omasta (CO Trout Unlimited); Dirk Schumacher (Three Rivers Resort); and Sonja Chavez, Beverly Richards, Jill Steele and Sue Uerling (all UGRWCD).

Chair Don Sabrowski called the meeting to order and announced the three representatives reappointed to TLUG for 2021 as follows: Roark Kiklevich, Andy Spann, and Pete Dunda. Chairman Sabrowski thanked these representatives for their continued service.

The meeting summary from the August 19, 2020 meeting was included in the meeting materials. There were no comments about or changes to this summary.

Erik Knight of the Bureau of Reclamation provided an update on Taylor River Operations. According to the Colorado River Forecast Center, the Taylor Reservoir is at 72 percent of average, which is on the border of the “dry” and “average” categories. As of the meeting date, there is no plan for any early spring releases. Erik said January was a particularly bad month for snow accumulation and while February was better, it was still below average. As of the first of March, the basin is at 50 percent of the weighted average of snow

accumulation. He's hoping the snow forecasted for this coming weekend will help bring up this percentage.

Chairman Sabrowski asked Erik if the new gages were installed at Texas and Willow Creek, how would this data affect the volume forecast model. Erik replied that these gages would help provide more accurate daily flow, but since the CRBFC bases their models on 30-years of historical data, it would be a period of time before the data from these gages might affect the volume forecast model. General Manager Sonja Chavez also indicated it takes time to develop rating curves before the newly installed gage readings would be accurate. Steve Anders from the USGS said that they would want to take measurements at lower flows when the gages are first installed (April) and then again during higher flows (May and June) to develop some preliminary readings, which will then be projected on their website. Steve did say there may need to be some minor alterations to the new gages to ensure accuracy.

- Chair Don Sabrowski asked TLUG members for any flow requests. Andy Spann said that he thinks irrigators would like to be as conservative as possible based on the present forecast models. He said that due to the large margin of error we saw last year in the model, he prefers a conservative approach (i.e. reduce releases the end of April thru May in order to get more water June through July 15). He is not making a formal recommendation at this time as it is a bit too early. Andy asked Sonja if she knows if the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association (UVWUA) has any plans for calling in the event of a short water year. Sonja said she has not spoken to Steve Anderson but would give him a call. She also noted that the Uncompahgre Valley was in D4 drought conditions almost all of last year so it could be a tough year.
- Mark Schumacher agreed that it was a little premature to make any requests at this time, but he would like to address this again at the April meeting.
- Roark Kiklevich agreed with Andy and Mark and said that if necessary, he would like to hold back some water for use later in the summer if conditions stay the same. He's hoping this big storm system off the coast will make it here.
- Pete Dunda agreed with the others on waiting for now on requests but said it would detrimental to basin water users if there was a call from UVWUA.
- Ryan Birdsey agreed that a conservative approach was the best course of action and noted that Snotel reports look good for the East River by not Taylor.
- Ernie Cockrell agreed with a conservative approach for now and offered that some cuts in April might be considered. Ernie asked Andy Spann how that might affect irrigation. Andy said there are some irrigators who do turn on their ditches in April, but that if cutting water in April saved

some for later, this might be helpful. Andy wondered if there were concerns around fishery impacts. Andy asked Erik Knight if he could calculate the storage benefits associated with possibly keeping April releases at 83 cfs? Erik ran the calculations and said that it would mean a gain of about 700 acre-feet.

General Manager Sonja Chavez reported that the Upper Gunnison Board of Directors has discussed the potential to have to purchase Aspinall Unit water this year to forestall a call from the Uncompahgre which impacts junior water rights to the Gunnison Tunnel.

Steve Anders (USGS) reported that he has done some reconnaissance on the installation of new gages at Texas and Willow Creek and it appears there are some gageable sections on both. He said that these gages would run seasonally from April through October. Steve is working with the Jon Hare of the Forest Service (USFS) to obtain permission for the gages. The USFS is supportive but would like to do a site inspection once the snow melts. Steve is hopeful this can be completed in April. With regard to funding for the gages, Steve indicated that Sonja's timing in requesting the gages was fortuitous. USGS has a new initiative, *the Next Generation Water Observing System (NGWOS)*, where they are trying to get a better handle on stream flow quality and quantity, and part of this initiative is to install more stream gages. Steve submitted the District's request for the gages to the NGWOS panel and they were approved. USGS will provide the funds to install these gages and cover initial Operation & Monitoring (O&M) costs in 2021. Steve pointed out that subsequent years were dependent upon annual congressional budget approvals and can change based upon political make-up of Congress or changes in administration. Sonja noted that this represents a cost savings of \$58,000 for the District in 2021 and if funded annually, a \$22,000 cost savings for O&M. Sonja asked Chairman Sabrowski if he was in agreement that the ongoing monitoring costs of \$22,000 should be budgeted as a precautionary measure. He agreed and will bring this before the District Board.

Steve also said that the USGS NGWOS initiative is to better understand snow, snowpack and its impact on water availability. Steve would like to have the project lead on this initiative come speak directly to the TLUG group.

Steve reported that the USGS is seeking to improve its water quality monitoring systems to include more data about the chemistry and temperature. He said the Gunnison stream gage sites that currently have temperature gages will be upgraded to get improved sensors that will provide real time measurement of specific conductance, pH, isotopes, turbidity, DOC (dissolved organic carbon). Steve would like the lead scientists involved in the initiative to speak directly to TLUG about the benefits of the new sensors.

General Manager Sonja Chavez asked Steve about possible coordination of the timing around when the USGS does their instrumentation checks, particularly later in July, which might alleviate some of the issues around gage corrections that happen after the biweekly forecasts are made. Steve said the USGS tries to visit the sites about every six weeks, with less visits in the winter due to ice. During peak, he said they try to do their checks a little more often. Sonja asked Steve how quickly their data gets to the people using the information. Steve said the data is usually available within a day or two and believes the Colorado River Forecast Center uses USGS real time data for their models. Erik said the Forecast Center uses real time data and if they have any concerns about any of the gage readings, they contact USGS right away or if USGS makes gage adjustments they are good about calling Reclamation. Steve said he would be willing to try to give us a heads-up a couple of weeks in advance. Steve expressed concerns about beavers possibly interfering with the natural flow at the stream gage proposed for installation at Willow Creek. Sonja Chavez asked Chairman Sabrowski if he was supportive of the District hiring an intern to help check the site every few days if needed? Ryan Birdsey offered that he and his family can help out with checking the gage as he said their family lives about two minutes from there.

General Manager Sonja Chavez reported that the District Board is going forward with a drought outreach campaign. As part of the campaign, the District held a contest asking for submissions of potential drought slogans. The winning slogan selected was “Water: It doesn’t grow on trees” submitted by Judy Bratcher of Lake City. Sonja hopes TLUG can help with the distribution of promotional products imprinted with the slogan and said she would have more details about the campaign at the April meeting.

Dan Omasta of Colorado Trout Unlimited has been contracted by the District to serve as the Coordinator of the Forest and Watershed Health Subgroup and Angling Recreation assessment being initiated through the Watershed Management Planning (WMP) process. Dan gave a Power Point presentation reviewing the angling assessments that have been conducted so far and talked about how these can be used to support and enhance recreational opportunities in the Taylor River Basin. Dan noted that the Angling Assessment report will be wrapped up shortly with the final report ready to be released later in March or early April 2021.

Dan also reported that the *Forest and Range Resiliency Project* will take place from 2021 through 2023 and that a key component of that effort was development of a framework for water and forest health managers to determining priority zones/areas for projects involving both watershed and forest health improvement components. As part of this project, Dan said the District has identified three main values: (1) Protection of existing beneficial uses; (2) Economic Stability, and (3) Protection of water quality and water quantity. The District has identified risks for each value as well. Last week, the

WMP met with representatives from the USFS to determine what data is available and what mapping assessments have been done to date. Dan explained that there would be more studies conducted with water users along the Taylor River to further assess areas of need. Ryan Birdsey with Taylor Park Marina said that a lot of legwork has already been conducted by the Taylor Park Adaptive Management work group that could help Dan's efforts. Dan will reach out to the AMG to review what's already been done so that there is no duplication of effort.

WMP Coordinator Jesse Kruthaupt, with the local Trout Unlimited chapter, reviewed some of the work he has been doing for the District on agricultural assessments and irrigation infrastructure projects. Although Jesse noted that there is not a lot of irrigation in the Taylor Rivers area, he encouraged the TLUG to help identify high priority areas of riparian degradation or other infrastructure issues. It was suggested that the Taylor Park cattle pool in the Texas Creek area could be an area of concern. General Manager Sonja Chavez also offered that through the District's contract with Applegate Engineering, Craig Ullman and his crew could possibly provide technical expertise to help with engineering efforts along the East and Taylor Rivers.

WMP consultant Kestrel Kunz (American Whitewater) reviewed her development of an interactive boatable days web tool that can help river users determine optimal river conditions for recreation. Kestrel demonstrated how the web tool works and asked for feedback from TLUG. She also noted that she hopes to gather more data going forward about the economic impact of recreational river users on the local economy.

Chairman Sabrowski asked if there is a way through the web tool to identify private property along the river and how stream flows can affect potential conflicts that can arise between river users and private landowners when water levels are low. Don noted that when flows are low, and boaters get hung-up there are more trespass issues and conflict. Kestrel noted that the WMP has discussed an effort to provide better signage and even a comprehensive map identifying private property along the Taylor.

Finally, General Manager Sonja Chavez shared a photo of the Gunnison River Restoration and Irrigation Improvement Project.

The meeting was adjourned at noon.