

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District  
Regular Board Meeting Minutes  
Monday, March 22, 2021**

The Board of Directors of the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District conducted a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, March 22, 2021 via Zoom video/teleconferencing at 5:30 p.m.

Board members present: Rosemary Carroll, Joellen Fonken, Rebie Hazard, Stacy McPhail, Julie Nania, Bill Nesbitt, John Perusek, Michelle Pierce, Don Sabrowski and Andy Spann.

Also present:

Isabella Biodini, Gunnison Country Times  
Sonja Chavez, General Manager  
Will Dujardin, Mayor Pro-tem, Crested Butte Town Council  
Shea Early, Town of Crested Butte  
Emily Halvorson, Colorado Department of Law  
Jesse Kruthaupt, Trout Unlimited  
John McClow, General Counsel  
Beverly Richards, Water Resource Specialist  
Jill Steele, Accountant/Office Manager  
Sue Uerling, Administrative Assistant

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Board President Michelle Pierce called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**2. AGENDA APPROVAL**

**Treasurer Bill Nesbitt moved and Director Rebie Hazard seconded approval of the agenda as circulated. The motion carried.**

**3. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS**

**Vice President Stacy McPhail moved and Treasurer Bill Nesbitt seconded approval of the consent agenda items. The motion carried.**

President Michelle Pierce informed the Board that they needed to have a brief discussion about returning to in-person meetings. Michelle apologized that the email circulated regarding Board Member Covid vaccine status was seen as wanting Board members' personal medical information as this was not the intent. Michelle said she would like to tentatively plan on an April in-person meeting but sought input from Board members. Director Bill Nesbitt offered that the meeting could also be offered via Zoom if anyone was uncomfortable with meeting in-person or unavailable to be present in person. Michelle noted that the Board had modified the meeting policy to attend and vote remotely if needed in response to the Covid pandemic. There was discussion about whether or not Board members should be required to wear masks at in-person meetings. Directors Joellen Fonken and Rosemary Carroll both felt that compliance with County mask requirements should be followed until informed otherwise. General Manager Sonja Chavez recommended that we avoid a group meal which requires mask removal, until we can comfortably sit outside. For the time being, public will only be allowed to participate in Board meetings via Zoom as our conference room space cannot accommodate visitors while still meeting social distance requirements. Director Carroll reported that Walmart is now offering the vaccine and getting people in quickly and suggested Board members call to get on their list if they're anxious to get the vaccine.

#### **4. LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE MATTERS**

General Counsel John McClow gave a progress report on the pending agreement regarding development of the hydroelectric generation facility proposed by Gunnison County Electric Association (GCEA) at the Taylor Park Dam. John said the GCEA is comfortable with the agreement with one minor change suggested by their legal counsel, but now the Bureau of Reclamation is trying to determine if they should also be a party to the agreement.

John reported that he and Sonja are still working on a statement of understanding for Demand Management and that they will have something for the Board to review at the April meeting.

John also said there have been no water bills of significance proposed by the legislature and very few water bills overall that would be of interest to the District.

## **5. PRESENTATION BY IAN BILLICK, DIRECTOR OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN BIOLOGICAL LABORATORY (RMBL)**

Ian Billick gave a general overview of RMBL's history and operations. General Manager Sonja Chavez reminded the Board that the District provides RMBL with \$5,000 every year for operations support. Ian said that RMBL was founded in 1928 by Dr. John Johnson and since then, the research done in the Gunnison basin has become a model for the rest of the world. RMBL provides access, collaboration and synthesis, and logistical support for researchers. New scientists want to come in and build on the research that has been done already and the number of researchers utilizing RMBL has grown substantially over the years. RMBL focuses on three intersecting bubbles of research: (1) ecology and evolutionary biology; (2) hydrology and biogeochemistry; and (3) atmospheric. The RMBL model is providing scientists the access and support they need which, in turn, brings a lot of resources to the Gunnison basin and is paying off in science data for this area. Ian said that now there is a dramatic confluence of tools in science which is really changing the field. Ian reported that RMBL is investing \$10 million to construct and operate an education facility at Vail (formerly CBMR) resort which will allow them to offer year-round research and education outreach opportunities.

## **6. BREAK**

## **7. GENERAL MANAGER AND COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **A. Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Bill Nesbit reported that we are working with a new company but with the same bond dealers. They are providing us with a different spreadsheet than the previous version. Return on investments is low compared to previous years and he reiterated that we are in the market for the long-term.

### **B. General Manager's Report**

Michelle referred to the Updated Policy on Board Committees provided in the packet and asked if there were any questions. None were raised.

**Treasurer Bill Nesbitt moved and Director Andy Spann seconded the adoption of the Updated Policy on Board Committees as submitted in the Board Packet. The motion carried.**

### **C. Watershed Management Planning Committee Update**

General Manager Sonja Chavez reported that the District has now submitted the application for the Colorado River District Partnership Project Funding Program for the Single Point of Diversion Project. Sonja said the application was well received by the Gunnison County BOCC and she secured their letter of support for the application. Sonja said the River District is estimating the response time may take four to six weeks. Sonja reported that it does look like the District will be required to secure a flood plain permit for the project. If funded, Sonja estimates the District could start the project in August 2021.

General Manager Chavez also reported that she submitted a contract request to Legal Counsel John McClow for Applegate Group agricultural engineering support and reminded the Board that she had obtained their approval of this budget line item last fall for up to \$150,000.

### **D. Taylor Local User's Group (TLUG) Update**

Director Don Sabrowski thanked Sonja for her efforts in securing USGS funding for the installation and first year of monitoring of the new Texas and Willow Creek gages. There was discussion about whether or not the District should include a line item for the \$22,000 annual monitoring cost in future years should Congress decide not to fund the USGS Next Generation Water Observing System (NGWOS). Director Sabrowski said the data collected from these gages informs reliable model development and that he would hate to see this critical data collection effort jeopardized. General Manager Sonja Chavez said Congress that it would be a good idea to add a line item in the District's future budget cycles to cover the monitoring just in case Congress does not fund NGWOS in future years.

Director Sabrowski said that Kestrel Kunz of American Whitewater gave a presentation to TLUG about the new boatable days web tool she has developed. Don said that this web tool informs boaters about most favorable flows, he suggested to Kestrel that the tool also include information to discourage boating when water flow is not sufficient to float

and when trespass issues could occur. Sonja offered that the District may be able to post an informational map on our website with boundaries of private lands. Sonja also reported that the District will be submitting an ad and an article for the Gunnison Country Times' summer magazine, which is heavily used by tourists, to encourage visitors to conserve water and review proper etiquette on the river, especially as it relates to drought conditions. Director Julie Nania and Director Joellen Fonken offered that both the Slate River Working Group and STOR had both developed information about boating etiquette and private property restrictions that may be helpful to the District's educational efforts. Sonja will follow-up on these resources.

### **E. Basin Water Supply Update**

Water Resource Specialist Beverly Richards gave a brief overview of current water conditions and said though there have been some marginal improvements, a good portion of Gunnison County is still in severe and extreme drought conditions. Bev said much of the western US is getting worse and that exceptional drought conditions are even expanding into Oregon. The forecast for the next three months is for drier and warmer than normal conditions. Stream flow is predicted to be at 57-65 percent of normal with Blue Mesa Reservoir estimated to fill to only about 67 percent.

General Manager Chavez said the District may need to purchase additional water from the Aspinall unit in case of future calls and that she will be starting initial conversations with Ryan Christianson of Reclamation and readying paperwork in order to be prepared. She and Bev will look into the cost of the water units for the next Board meeting.

### **F. Upper Gunnison Water Monitoring Program Update**

President Pierce referred to the memo in the Board packet and there were no questions about the memo.

### **G. Grant Committee Update**

President Pierce referenced the grant meeting summary and the recommendations from the committee. Director Nesbitt commented that he really liked the idea of providing some funding for engineering consulting on some of the projects. General Manager Chavez said that there were a few projects that involved some significant stream flow alterations and riparian

work that require the expertise of an engineer and she was glad that Craig Ullman is available to provide this service. Sonja explained that by moving funding out of the District Grant budget line item and into the District's General Engineering Support line item, the grant applicants will not be required to match the engineering expenses.

**Director Joellen Fonken moved approving the transfer of \$30,000 from available grant funds to the Non-Operating Budget, General Consulting Line Item 37 for engineering in support of 2021 grant projects. The motion carried.**

**Director Julie Nania moved approving the Grant Committee's recommendations in awarding \$177,721 in District Grant funds for 2021 projects, with some awards contingent upon the receipt of additional requested information. The motion carried.**

Director Nesbitt asked about the two applications that were not awarded any funding and Sonja reported that one of those projects was for annual operations and maintenance, which is not allowed under the grant policies, and the second was for a private individual to purchase an electric ATV for LSC ice grooming with incomplete application information including, among other things, letters of financial support from Lake City or Hinsdale County.

## **H. Education and Outreach Update**

Water Resource Specialist Beverly Richards reported the District is working on redesigning the website to make it more streamlined and user friendly. The staff has developed the overall framework and is working with Rob Strickland of Midnight Marketing Solutions to get the framework up and running and provide training for the staff so that regular ongoing updates can be handled in-house. A conference call is scheduled with Rob for tomorrow to review the requested updates and move forward from there.

Administrative Assistant Sue Uerling reported that from the blind voting, the drought slogan "Water, it doesn't grow on trees," submitted by Judy Bratcher of Lake City, was the winner selected from over a dozen entries. Three separate logos have been developed using this slogan, along with a second one submitted by Director Fonken. These logos will be used on yard signs, water bottles, stickers, and canvas bags, as well as in radio, print and social media advertising. Sue reported that the District will need volunteers

to help distribute the promotional products and she's hoping to enlist the Boy Scouts and other civic groups to help with the process. Sue will report further on these efforts at the next Board meeting. Sonja also recorded three radio spots with messages about the drought that will rotate on three area radio stations. The District will also be updating its underwriting messages with KBUT-FM to make them more focused on drought.

In addition, the District selected Teresa Golden as the winner of the "World Water Day Photo Contest" and her images will be used on the District's website and advertising. A press release announcing both contest winners was sent to area newspapers last week.

### **I. Gunnison Basin Roundtable Update**

Director Julie Nania reported that the meeting last week included a number of housekeeping items. Julie said the CWCB has created an online portal at: <https://engagecwcb.org/> to solicit input from the general public. In addition, Julie said the meeting focused on education, including getting school groups back to the Eureka Science Center and getting students involved in a youth water summit. Director Nania thanked Sonja for the District's support of \$200 to send two students from Hotchkiss to the summit. Julie said there will be a webinar on April 4<sup>th</sup> that is open to the public to discuss Forest and Watershed Health. Julie said the Yampa and White Districts put out a policy position paper on Demand Management, which she thought was well written and well thought out and would be a good resource for the District in developing its statement. Julie reported that partial funding was approved for two diversion and efficiency projects.

### **J. Scientific Endeavors**

Director Rosemary Carroll reported that planning is underway for an annual retreat likely to be held in Mt. Crested Butte. It will primarily be limited to scientists, but she is hoping to be able to invite Sonja. Rosemary says she is excited for RMBL's plans to have SAIL (Surface Atmosphere Integrated Laboratory) coming to Mt. CB and will begin moving some of her own modeling experiments over to SAIL next Fall. Rosemary said they are always tracking snowpack, streamflow, etc. in the upper basin and that it is still looking pretty bad right now.

### **K. Long Lake Stakeholders Work Group Update**

Director Carroll said the group met for the second time and identified official existing trails and recommended closure of other trails. She said they discussed ways to deal with trespassing and looked into parking improvements and trash management, as well as the metrics of sustainability for Long Lake. She said there will be an onsite meeting in May with stakeholders to review short-term goals onsite. Director Carroll would like to meet with John and Sonja to discuss the District's goals for Long Lake, also known as Meridian Lake Reservoir.

#### **L. Gunnison River Festival Update**

Director Joellen Fonken said moving the festival to early June was probably a good move since it seems like low water will be an issue this summer. She is excited about some speakers who have been secured for educational presentations, including Paul Jones of Wet Meadows and Duane Vandebusch. New this year will be a 5K fun run at the Van Tuyl Trail. The white water race will take place on the Taylor River and Kestrel Kunz will give a presentation following the race about the American Whitewater boating web tool. Joellen reached out to the folks at Lake San Cristobal but they have decided to wait until 2022 to be involved once the LSC island property transfer and improvements are complete. Joellen is also working with Jesse Kruthaupt of Trout Unlimited to plan a fishing derby in August as part of the festival.

### **8. DEMAND MANGEMENT FRAMEWORK UPDATE**

As reported earlier, General Counsel John McClow and General Manager Sonja Chavez will continue to work on a draft to be presented at the April Board meeting.

### **9. MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS**

President Pierce referenced the news release and articles included in the packet.

General Manager Sonja Chavez announced that the State of Colorado will now be able to pull boats over to inspect their hulls for invasive aquatic species.



Sonja also said that Accountant Jill Steele is working with area banks to prepare new signature cards (adding John Perusek and removing George Sibley) for all District accounts. Once the banks are ready with their required paperwork, check signors will be notified with instructions on signing the new signature cards, which will probably require a visit to the banks.

Sonja referenced the press release about her appointment to the DCNR Water Equity Task Force and said this is a short term appointment and that the group will probably meet five or six times over the next several months and focus on public outreach and education. Sonja does not believe it will require a big time commitment.

Director Nesbitt expressed concern that Shea Early from the CB water treatment plant had to write a letter to area newspaper editors stating that CB drinking water is safe as a result of the scientific data presented at the last Board meeting.

The Board celebrated the closing on the sale of 60 base augmentation units. This will result in income of \$210,000 for the Upper Gunnison River Water Activity Enterprise and leave a total 343 units remaining.

## **10. CITIZEN COMMENTS**

No comments were brought forth.

## **11. FUTURE MEETINGS**

See schedule in Board Packet.

## **12. SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS**

John and Sonja will continue to work on the draft of the Demand Management statement of understanding.

Sonja and Director Nania will follow-up the WaterSmart group about getting the District's drought marketing materials to area restaurants and motels.

Sonja will look into the possibility of having banners on Highways 149, 114 and 50 with a message about conserving water during the drought.

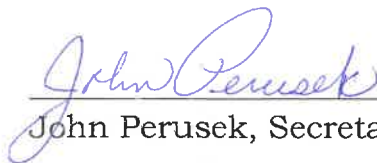
Sonja will follow up with Julia and Joellen to review work that has already been done on identification of private properties on the rivers and river etiquette messaging.

Sonja will reach out to Steve Anderson again at UVWUA to discuss conditions for the irrigating season.


**13. ADJOURNMENT**

Board President Michelle Pierce adjourned the March 22, 2021 meeting at 7:36 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

  
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John Perusek, Secretary

APPROVED:

  
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Michelle Pierce, President