

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District
Meeting Minutes of the Board of Directors
Monday, May 22, 2023**

The Board of Directors of the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District conducted a regular Board meeting on Monday, May 22, 2023 at 1:00 p.m. in the Lake City Fire Hall, 131 North Henson Street, Lake City, CO 81235 and via Zoom video/teleconferencing.

Board members present: Rosemary Carroll, Joellen Fonken (via Zoom), Rebie Hazard (via Zoom), Stacy McPhail (via Zoom), Bill Nesbitt, John Perusek, Michelle Pierce and Andy Spann.

Board members absent: Julie Nania and Don Sabrowski

Others present:

Sonja Chavez, UGRWCD General Manager
John Coy, LSCWAE Representative
Cheryl Cwelich, UGRWCD Water Resource Specialist I
Jeff Derry, Colorado Dust on Snow Program (via Zoom)
Zach Dutra, Lake Fork Valley Conservancy Director
Robert Hurd, LSCWAE Representative
Alana Nichols, UGRWCD Fellow
Beverly Richards, UGRWCD Water Resource Specialist II
Sue Uerling, UGRWCD Admin. Asst/Communications Specialist (via Zoom)
Henry Woods, LSCWAE Representative

1. CALL TO ORDER

Board President Michelle Pierce called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

2. AGENDA APPROVAL

Director Bill Nesbitt moved and Director Rosemary Carroll seconded approval of the agenda as circulated. The motion carried.

3. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

Director Rebie Hazard requested that the May 2, 2022 Special Board Meeting minutes and the Budget Summary be removed from the Consent Agenda Items for separate consideration.

Director Bill Nesbitt moved and Director Andy Spann seconded approval of the April 24, 2023 Board of Directors meeting minutes. The motion carried.

Director Rebie Hazard noted that in the May 2, 2023 Special Board Meeting Minutes, her name is not listed either in the “Board members present” section, nor the “Board members absent” section. Since she was not in attendance, Director Hazard asked that this be noted in the minutes. She also commented that in the current Budget Summary on page 3 of the financials, there is a line that includes both “Audit and Accounting” as one line item. Director Hazard thinks combining these expenses on one line makes it confusing for the public as it currently shows that the District is at 174.8% of budget. She does not want the public to think there are any issues with the audit, since this percentage is really a reflection of changing accounting personnel/procedures. General Manager Sonja Chavez said that the audit expenses and accounting expenses can be reported as two separate line items in future budget summaries.

Director Bill Nesbitt moved and Director Andy Spann seconded approval of the May 2, 2023 Special Board Meeting Minutes and the May 2023 Financial Reports with the changes requested by Director Hazard. The motion carried.

4. COLORADO DUST-ON-SNOW PROGRAM UPDATE, JEFF DERRY

Jeff Derry, the executive director of the Colorado Dust-On-Snow program, gave a presentation on the water year 2023 to date. Jeff said that thanks to a lot of moisture in the west earlier in the year, this tended to keep the dust in the deserts packed down and there really weren’t any significant dust-on-snow events until April 2023. Since then, there have been six dust-on-snow events, with the events on April 3 and 4 being the largest so far. Jeff outlined some of the activity throughout the basin and noted that Spring Creek Pass is average while the East River region has a significant blanket of dust. This is also true for the Roaring Fork Castle Creek region. Jeff said the 2023 water year will be classified as an average year for dust-on-snow events, whereas 2022 was classified as a “severe” year for the entire western Colorado region.

Jeff noted that there have been 31 atmospheric river events in California through March of this water year. There were several instances where those atmospheric rivers reached into Colorado helping 2023 become an above average year for snowpack. Jeff also noted it has been a good year for snow water equivalency; and as of May 21, 2023, the region was at 221 percent of median and 62 percent of median peak. Jeff said the 8-14 day precipitation outlook is for above normal precipitation with the temperature outlook being near normal. Nighttime temperatures are still hovering at or below freezing, which is helping slow the snowmelt.

Jeff also reported that there has been an abundance of microplastics found in snowpack samples and that they believe a good portion of these microplastics are coming from motor vehicle tire wear. He noted that tires are actually white and then dyed black with plastics.

Jeff also said there was a good article written by *The Colorado Sun* (May 18, 2023 edition) that went more in-depth about the dust-on snow program and how it benefits water managers. Jeff said the reporter, Tracy

Ross, did a good job of following the story from the Colorado headwaters to the desert lowlands, explaining the problems with dust and managing streamflow along the way. It also addressed some of the political issues surrounding government policy that holds whoever is responsible for degrading the soil accountable. Jeff encouraged those in attendance to sign up for his weekly email reports by sending him an email at: jderry@snowstudies.org.

Director Bill Nesbitt asked Jeff if they are able to forecast dust-on-snow events based on trends they have seen in the past? Jeff said that as the season progresses, in his almost weekly updates, he gives an albedo update/forecast. He said he can predict accurately what the albedo is going to do, which, in turn, affects what the streamflow is going to do. He can also predict whether streamflow is going to go up or down, but that predicting the volume of water is much more challenging.

Director Joellen Fonken asked Jeff if the heavy smoke from the wildfires in Canada is affecting the snowmelt. Jeff said that his accurate answer is “I don’t know.” However, he said that there is the possibility that the incoming solar radiation is being blocked somewhat by the smoke particles in the air but that his best guess is that a lot of heat from the sun is still getting through.

Director Rosemary Carroll asked if Jeff and his team collect specific data on microplastics and how he feels these might directly affect the snowpack or affect albedo. Jeff answered that they did not intend specifically to collect data on microplastics but they found during their regular snow surveys, there are microplastics in virtually every sample when they looked at them under the microscope. Jeff said they will continue to collect samples and note the microplastics content but that at this time they are not making any direct correlations between the microplastics and the solar radiation input and output. Jeff said that there have been a couple of papers written on this topic which might provide such data.

General Manager Sonja Chavez said she had read an article about polyflouryl alka substances (PFAs) being found in high mountain streams. She wondered if Jeff had any information about this. Jeff said he did not. He said it makes sense that you would find this in high mountain streams, but that fortunately, in the Red Mountain Pass area there have not been any forest fires. He said that down by Durango, they have experienced more fires and that he can follow-up with them and see if their samples are showing any such particles.

5. BASIN WATER SUPPLY UPDATE

Water Resource Specialist Beverly Richards referenced her Basin Water Supply Report included in the Board packet and said that drought conditions have remained the same since early March and that precipitation has been running at about 100 percent. Beverly noted that her report matches Jeff’s predictions of above average precipitation and slightly cooler than normal temperatures, which will slow down the snowmelt. At this time, Bev said that three of the five SNOTEL sites used to determine the Upper Gunnison Basin snowpack have already melted out. She said that Schofield is still reporting about 31 inches of snow but that all of the sites will likely be melted out in the next couple of weeks. Beverly said that the

streamflows are definitely rising and that the East River was reporting a streamflow of 2200 cfs today versus 1100 cfs just a week ago, which is well over the historical average. She thinks this will continue for a week or two as Schofield melts out.

Bev said that in a webinar she attended a couple of weeks ago, the question was asked what would it take to fill all reservoirs and the presenter answered “three years of water years like 2023 without anyone using any water.” However, since everyone will be using water, he said then it would likely take six to eight consecutive years of above average water years.

Beverly said the cloud seeding program for this winter ended on April 15, 2023 with 1900 generator hours, including hours on the new remote generator on Black Mesa. She said the generator at Lake Irwin broke down in March and because of the high snowpack, no one was able to get up there to repair it, but that repairs are planned there for this summer. Bev also reported that North American Weather Consultants have proposed to the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) that another remote generator be added 18 miles west of the new remote generator at Black Mesa. Bev said she initially expressed concerns that this generator is actually just outside of the District boundaries, but she was told that the snow that it would generate would actually fall inside the District. Bev said it sounds like the CWCB may end up funding the whole cost of installation and operations for this new remote generator and that the District would only be responsible for supplies. Bev also said that there are other cloud seeding generator locations being proposed, including some new ones in western Utah and California. She said that in Colorado, the CWCB has traditionally supported the program with about \$350,000 annually and that this year, they have \$600,000 earmarked for the 2023-2024 program.

Director Bill Nesbitt asked Beverly if they are still predicting the elevation of Blue Mesa to be about 82 percent at peak . Beverly said it is and that the District should be getting some updated reports from the Bureau on year-end storage predictions in the next couple of weeks.

Beverly spoke with Jeff Deems, and he said they have flights scheduled this weekend over the East River and Taylor River Basins and then the Dolores Basin on Monday, which should provide some updated information on snowpack. There was discussion about the expense of these flights and Bev reported that if more basins become involved and the ASO flight areas expand, then the cost will likely come down. There were also some snow-off ASO flights scheduled for the front range, but there is discussion about moving these flights to early next season to save money.

General Manager Sonja Chavez noted that there are reports of 200 percent of normal for snowpack, but she said that is for the entire Gunnison Basin and does not give a clear picture of the Upper Gunnison basin. She said the ASO flights help with this.

Water Resource Specialist Cheryl Cwelich noted that the Gunnison Sheriff’s Department issued a dangerous river conditions warning on May 18 for all watercraft vessels between Almont and North Bridge at Highway 135 saying bridges are unnavigable. This was posted on the UGRWCD’s social media platforms.

Director Bill Nesbitt said he had heard a comment that there were no sandbags available in the area. Sonja replied that Gunnison County has a supply but that they are smaller sandbags.

There was follow-up discussion about the expense and effectiveness of ASO flights. General Manager Sonja Chavez reported that the District submitted a grant application to the BOR for \$1M to support the Upper Gunnison River Basin Snow Water Supply Measurement grant proposal. Sonja noted that the District would utilize BOR funding to conduct two ASO snow surveys per year over a three-year period in the Upper Gunnison River Basin. She noted that these flights could really help with providing accurate snow measurement and precipitation data for much more accurate water supply and inflow information. Director Rosemary Carroll noted that this is also very valuable data for her studies and that there are a lot of scientists using the ASO data. Water Resource Specialist Beverly Richards noted that almost all the basins in the state, eight total, had also applied for this funding grant. Sonja and Rosemary explained the ASO process of flying over various parts of the watershed to shoot radar across the snowpack to get the data needed for modeling.

6. GENERAL MANAGER, STAFF AND COMMITTEE UPDATES

Treasurers Report: Treasurer Bill Nesbitt noted that currently US Treasury notes are paying interest at rates of 5.23 percent for a six-month note; 5.09 percent for a 12-month note; 4.3% for a two-year note; and 3.78 percent for a five-year note. He noted that this is still inverted. He also provided a comparison of the federal funds rate from a year ago to today and said that he is still waiting to see what happens with inflation. Bill stated that he believes the District made a good investment in purchasing Unit A at the current Spencer Business Park for cash in the amount of \$650,000. He noted that feelers have been put out to possible renters and that there has been interest. He conducted a free analysis of what he thinks the District could charge in rent and what return that would provide in return for the District and he believes it could range from 5.9 percent on the low side to 6.2 percent on the high side. As for other investments, he is still taking a wait and see approach and is watching China and Russia closely.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) – Snow Water Supply Measurement Grant: General Manager Sonja Chavez noted that this grant was discussed earlier and that the District was hoping to hear back about on awards by August. President Michelle Pierce referred to Resolution 2023-03 included in the packet, which is a requirement of the grant application, and asked if anyone had questions about the resolution. No questions were raised.

Director Bill Nesbitt moved and Director Rosemary Carroll seconded approval of Resolution 2023-03 ad circulated. The motion carried.

Spencer Avenue Condominium Association Roof Replacement: General Manager Sonja Chavez reported that the District closed on the purchase of Unit A on May 12, 2023. Since then, District management has been developing plans to review with an architectural and structural engineer to make the current Suite A

suitable for District operations. This includes developing an estimated expense spreadsheet and annual budget for the building.

Sonja noted that the roof replacement is still projected to begin in mid to late June and that the contractor, Bullet Construction, is in direct contact with the solar panel company about the timing of the removal and reinstallation and storage of the solar panels.

Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) Consultant Team Selection

Sonja reported that staff and the Request For Proposal team had selected Strategic by Nature & Harris Engineering (SBN Team) to oversee the DCP. Stacy Beaugh SBN and Carrie Lyle-Padgett (from Harris Water Engineering in Durango) have extensive experience leading similar projects. Sonja said they are putting together the scope of work and will have a contract ready soon. This is being funded by a BOR grant for \$140,000 plus \$20,000 from the District budget.

Watershed Management Planning Update – Sonja said the District has been very successful in their WMP fundraising efforts and are actually developing plans to spend down some of the monies, which is a good problem to have. She noted that two assessments have now been completed, the Wildfire Risk Assessment and Phase 1 of the Geo-Fluvial Assessment. On May 2, the District made a presentation to the Town of Lake City about the assessments. The presentation was well attended and there was good discussion.

Wet Meadows Program: Water Resource Specialist Cheryl Cwelich reported that Max Sawyer started in his role as the Field Supervisor of the sagebrush steppe and wet meadows conservation crew. She noted that last week they began training a field crew of about 10 individuals who are very passionate about restoration and wetlands. This crew will be working across land boundaries including Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) and private land and that they will help with assessments of wet meadows for future planning, as well as the construction and installation of structures, and cheatgrass treatments, seed collection, seeding and road decommissioning.

Cheryl also reported that she has partnered with the CPW on a \$3.5 million grant to coordinate a combined wet meadows and cheatgrass mitigation project in the basin, which would include providing funding for the salary of a cheatgrass coordinator who would work with the County, BLM, CPW and Wet Meadows on mitigation efforts.

President Michelle Pierce asked Cheryl if the high snowpack and runoff will be a help to the Wet Meadows program and Cheryl answered that yes, with the structures that have already been built and installed, this will help keep this runoff in place longer and benefit the wildlife and livestock who use this water. She noted that of the 1 percent of the basin that is considered wet meadows, this directly feeds 80 percent of the wildlife and livestock in the basin.

Education and Outlook Update – UGRWCD Communications Specialist reported that the recent City-wide and River clean up on May 13 went really well and that there were around 50 volunteers who helped with the clean-up at the Gunnison White Water Park. She said the timing was perfect as the clean-up crew was able to get the park and riverbanks in good shape right before the water started to rise. Sue also noted that Colt Maul is very enthusiastic about his art show at the Gunnison Arts Center on June 2nd which the District supported through a Mini-Grant. He will be giving his presentation at 7 p.m. and is encouraging everyone to come to his “Arteries of the Earth” show. Director Bill Nesbitt asked how many of the first-grade water books were distributed this school year and Sue replied that while she did not have the exact number handy, all of the first graders in both Gunnison and Crested Butte were given the book “Drop” and a supply had just been delivered for the Lake City first graders, which President Pierce has agreed to distribute following the meeting. Bill explained how the books have become an annual outreach effort on behalf of the District. Sonja also noted that the District is working on an effort to better coordinate with the Lake City School so that they can take part in a field trip to Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory (RMBL) this next Fall which focuses on education about the watershed. As Bev was scrolling through photos of the Ag Venture Days and 4th Grade Water Festival, LSCWAE representative John Coy asked about the mobility of the water trailer and said he would love to see a grass roots effort in Lake City led by school children, teachers and their parents to get volunteers to help plant vegetation to prevent bank erosion. Sue noted that the trailer is available for educational opportunities with advance planning.

Taylor Local Users Group – In Don Sabrowski’s absence, General Manager Chavez noted that the group has been meeting monthly since March with the goal of making recommendations on releases from Taylor Reservoir to deal with the higher spring runoff while also maintaining a good level of storage in the reservoir at the end of the year. So far this season, the projections received from the BOR and UCAR have been fairly accurate in terms of inflows, so it was decided the group would not meet twice in May. The next meeting is June 8, 2023 at noon.

Scientific Endeavors: Director Rosemary Carroll reported that with respect to weather data collection, for the past couple of years, the Department of Energy SAIL program has had a large amount of equipment, including radar, stationed at the top of CBMR. These data will be processed in the future for use by atmospheric scientists and hydrologists around the world. Unfortunately, she said all of this infrastructure, including the radar equipment that was on loan from Colorado State University, will be pulled out and going to other locations mid-June of this year. The NOAA SPLASH atmospheric program and its infrastructure will be removed in September. She also noted that she has just returned from a Department of Energy conference in DC, where the Science Focus Area (SFA) project run by Lawrence Berkeley National Lab presented results and discussed science objectives for the next four years. While focus over the next four years will remain in the East River, the SFA will begin collecting data in the Taylor River basin and it will be good to coordinate activities in Trail Creek with the District and the USGS who are looking at the effects Beaver Dam Analogues on hydrology.

Miscellaneous Updates: General Manager Sonja Chavez noted that she and John had spoken to the Gunnison Stockgrowers Association about a detailed water budget and irrigation return flow study instead of

asking them to do demand management and that it was well received. Director Andy Spann mentioned that a number of the stockgrowers were of the opinion that there needs to be data to show how experimental fallowing affects the amount of water that comes from this in relation to the adverse effects of fallowing. He said they would also like to see data collected about how much water from irrigation diversions actually recharges the groundwater system. Sonja reported that there is a company called LoRaWan that makes environmental sensors that can be used to measure soil moisture content and she will be getting more information on these later in the week.

Director Bill Nesbitt also mentioned that the western states of Arizona, Nevada and California are still overusing water while asking us to contribute to restoring levels in Lake Powell.

Sonja also noted that data collection related to the Harmful Algae Bloom study at Blue Mesa have concluded. Data is currently being analyzed. Director Bill Nesbitt asked if there were any plans to study the effects of HAB's downstream from Blue Mesa. Sonja replied that this was not part of their scope of study.

Gunnison Basin Roundtable: – General Manager Chavez said she was unable to attend the meeting on May 15th but had heard that there were a couple of projects presented for funding consideration. General Counsel was present.

Gunnison River Festival: GRF Director Cheryl Cwelich referred to her memorandum included in the packet and noted that due to high flows, a couple of the river events were pushed later into the summer. Zach Dutra of Lake Fork Valley Conservancy noted that they will host a Stand Up Paddle board (SUP) event on July 29, 2023 on Lake San Cristobal which includes a half-day event with paddleboard yoga and some other morning activities. Cheryl said the Sunni-Gunni float will now take place on August 26th, after the Western University students are back for classes in an effort to involve more of them and present river safety recommendations. Cheryl also said Gunnison County plans to erect some signage at the Gunnison Whitewater Park about river safety, especially for those who navigate through the Kemel-Owens #2 diversion structure downstream of the Gunnison Whitewater Park..

STOR Committee Update: Water Resource Specialist Beverly Richards attended the meeting but said the focus was ongoing work on STOR's Strategic Plan.

CBLT Long Lake Planning Committee Update: Director Rosemary Carroll said the group is really not meeting any more but that there were some concerns raised by the Allen family about erosion of the banks at Long Lake due to heavy usage. Sonja indicated that the District relayed to Rosemary that they would appreciate any information about plans that include addressing erosion concerns on the section representing the dam structure. Rosemary offered to follow-up on this.

7. MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

President Michelle Pierce made note that in the packet was the current Gunnison River spreadsheet as well as letter from the City of Gunnison about the upcoming free swim lessons they will offer at the Rec Center for

seven days after Memorial Day. The District's Education and Outreach plan includes a line item of \$500 to support these swim lessons.

8. CITIZENS COMMENTS

No citizens elected to make comments.

9. FUTURE MEETINGS

President Michelle Pierce referred to the schedule of upcoming meetings included in the Board packet and noted that the deadline for Board applications to Judge Patrick is this Friday at 5 p.m.

10. SUMMARY OF MEETING ACTION ITEMS

General Manager Sonja Chavez said she would follow up with an email to Director Carroll to invite her to listen in on the LoRaWan presentation about their environmental sensors.

Thomas Stoeber PC, CPA's will be asked to separate the Accounting and Audit expenses on the Budget Summary for future reports.

A Finance Committee meeting date will be finalized and members will be notified. Currently considering June 8th.


11. ADJOURNMENT

Board President Michelle Pierce adjourned the May 22, 2023 regular Board meeting at 2:53 p.m.

MINUTES SUBMITTED:


John Perusek, Secretary

APPROVED:


Michelle Pierce, President