

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District
Meeting Minutes of the Board of Directors
Monday, October 28, 2024**

The Board of Directors of the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District (UGRWCD) conducted a regular Board meeting on Monday, October 28, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. at the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District, 210 West Spencer, Suite A, Gunnison, Colorado and via Zoom video/teleconference.

Board members present: Joellen Fonken, Rebie Hazard (via Zoom), Stacy McPhail, Julie Nania, Rosemary Carroll, John Perusek, Mike Rogers (via Zoom), Don Sabrowski, and Brooke Zanetell.

Board members absent: Andy Spann

Others present:

Sonja Chavez, UGRWCD General Manager

Jeff Deems, Airborne Snow Observatory (via Zoom)

Bailey Friedman, UGRWCD Water Resources Project Manager

John McClow, UGRWCD General Counsel

Alana Nichols, UGRWCD Fellow

Beverly Richards, UGRWCD Office/Senior Program Manager

Tom Rozman, Colorado Division of Water Resources

Sue Uerling, UGRWCD Administrative Asst./Communications Specialist

Ari Yamaguchi, UGRWCD Water Resources Technician

Baxter and Jean Vieux, Applied Research Team

1. CALL TO ORDER

President Stacy McPhail called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

President McPhail announced the passing of Polly Spann (wife of former Board member, Lee Spann) and Matt Peacock (former Board member).

General Manager Sonja Chavez introduced Bailey Friedman as the new Water Resources Project Manager. Ms. Friedman shared a bit about her background and said she is glad to be in Gunnison.

2. AGENDA APPROVAL

Director John Perusek moved and Director Joellen Fonken seconded approval of the agenda as presented. The motion carried.

3. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

Director Rosemary Carroll moved and Director Julie Nania seconded approval of the consent agenda as presented. The motion carried.

4. GENERAL COUNSEL UPDATE

General Counsel John McClow reported that he met with the Bureau of Reclamation on October 21st regarding the extension of the 1975 Agreement. The Basis of Negotiation has been signed and the next step will be a public negotiation process. On November 5, 2024, they will hold a technical meeting to discuss operations. Each party to the Agreement will designate a negotiating team and the teams will schedule negotiation meetings. Counselor McClow offered that public negotiation meetings could be held in the District Conference Room. These will be scheduled in January 2025.

He also reported that he has been reviewing the Board Member Manual and said it will need several revisions. Some of the material is no longer valid, some of the information has changed or been updated and many of the Board policies no longer accurately reflect current procedures. He will be presenting proposed policy changes at the next Board meeting for consideration.

5. PRESENTATION BY JEAN AND BAXTER VIEUX OF APPLIED RESEARCH TEAM ON MAPPING SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT WITH WEATHER RADAR

General Manager Sonja Chavez updated the Board that the Gunnison Gap Weather Radar was approved by the BLM for placement on the Big Mesa. She noted that the original agreement was for a permanent radar station and the one that will be installed there is mounted on a trailer and therefore required additional review and consultation. She encouraged Vern Tharpe to try to get the radar to the location in the next few weeks before the snow starts accumulating.

Jean Vieux introduced herself as CEO of Applied Research Team, Inc. and introduced her husband, Baxter, who is a PhD and the Chief Engineer and Scientist for the organization. The two of them have been studying precipitation from weather radar for several decades and moved to Colorado 12 years ago at which time they added snow studies to their research. They are calling their latest study Gunnison SnowQ. Mrs. Vieux explained that SnowQ™ has a patent pending and uses weather radar combined with physics-guided machine learning and other data resources (such as ASO and SAR) to train and measure snowfall and track snow water equivalency (which they refer to as snow quotient). She noted that they have been conducting research and processing data for two locations to date in Colorado, one on the Grand Mesa area and one in the Rio Grande area. By adding the Upper Gunnison to this mix, Ms. Vieux reported that there would be some overlapping study plots for each of these locations which will provide useful data for all three sites. She noted that currently no one else is providing this kind of SnowQ data commercially.

Baxter Vieux said their system uses Physics Based Machine Learning to analyze data from SNOTEL sites, ASO flights and Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) which is then mapped and overlapped over time. In addition, they are also getting data from non-federal ground-based weather radars in Durango and Alamosa and plan to add the new radar at Big Mesa in Gunnison County once it is up and running. He explained the spatial and temporal resolution area for the various data resources provides SnowQ with a resolution area of 90 X 90 meters.

They both noted that through the combination and analysis of all this data, SnowQ is providing “astoundingly good results” with just over 90 percent accuracy compared to other snow data models. They reported that they currently have a funding proposal pending with NASA to use their technology in the Yuma Basin, California.

Director Don Sabrowski asked if you have to pay for use of the radar? They replied that in Alamosa, the county pays for it and then secures funding from other sources in the county to help offset their expenses. In Durango, the City bought the radar outright. There is also federally funded radar that you can access for free. They said the systems require maintenance which can run \$50,000 annually. Director Sabrowski asked if they have negotiated for the Gunnison radar yet? They replied that they have a promise letter of in-kind data support and that the Gunnison Basin Roundtable has acknowledged this as their match. They said that some private radar companies are funded on a subscription basis.

Director Sabrowski asked if SnowQ could replace ASO flights. They replied that they aren’t in business to replace anyone but can help provide additional data in between ASO flights and provide another resource for water managers who cannot afford ASO flights. “We want to collaborate with ASO, not replace anyone,” said Jean Vieux. Director Sabrowski said it sounds promising.

Director Rosemary Carroll asked if they were looking at the melt component, which they are not. She also asked how they calibrate between basins. Baxter Vieux explained their system. Director Carroll noted that they will have ASO data that they can use for the Gunnison valley to include in their research and wondered if they would be preparing a report of their findings. Jean Vieux said they had received permission from their project manager at Reclamation to share their findings, so they intend to do the research, provide the data to those interested and let folks tell them if the report is useful. Director Carroll noted that it would be useful.

Jean and Baxter Vieux thanked the Board for the invitation to present and said they look forward to the Upper Gunnison Gap Radar being up and running.

6. 2025 DRAFT BUDGET WORK SESSION

President McPhail noted that in the Board packet was the 2025 Draft Budget Message and the current revised 2025 draft budget. General Manager Chavez reviewed the changes made since the last draft of the budget that was presented at the September Board meeting. As she reviewed each of the changes, she did report to the Board that she had heard back from the Colorado River District that they are still going to fund the ASO flights for 2025 but after that, the District will have to find a new funding source. She also said a line item had been added to hire a professional consultant to conduct strategic planning in 2025 with a place holder of \$30,000 while she conducts some additional research to get a better idea of what the District might expend.. She intends to follow-up with the Colorado River District to learn more about the consultant they are using.

Ms. Chavez said the District got word this morning from the USGS that in addition to the \$100,000 that the USGS had originally allocated toward the Ag Irrigation Return Flow study, they will be able to provide an additional \$100,000 towards the study thereby decreasing the District's liability from \$354,000 to \$254,000 in 2025.

There were no questions from the Board on the 2025 Draft Budget or Budget Message.

7. BASIN WATER SUPPLY UPDATE

Senior Program Manager Beverly Richards provided a brief Power Point presentation to point out some of the changes to the water supply forecast that have occurred since she originally prepared her report. Overall, most of the changes were good news as there has been some precipitation in the District in the last couple of weeks and this has helped alleviate degrading drought conditions.

8. GENERAL MANAGER, STAFF AND COMMITTEE UPDATES

Executive Committee Report – President McPhail reported that the committee had met to conduct senior staff reviews. They also discussed the recommendations for compensation for all staff based on the “Total Rewards” philosophy that was adopted previously. She reported that the committee is in agreement with the compensation package suggested by the General Manager and said the committee was very comfortable with how the staff has grown. She said it is now the appropriate size to handle the increased workload. It was noted that if any of the Board has specific questions or concerns about personnel that these matters could be discussed in Executive Session at the next meeting. Board members should let the General Manager know if there are concerns that need to be addressed in Executive Session so this can be added to the agenda for November. President McPhail reported that the regular staff reviews are being finalized and the final recommendations for compensation will be reflected in the budget numbers next month and that the Executive Committee was in full support of the reviews and compensation package.

President McPhail reported that the committee also discussed the officer positions and were ready to vote on the officers for the remainder of 2024 and 2025 until the annual meeting. She noted the recommended slate of officers is as follows: Stacy McPhail, President; Rosemary Carroll, Vice President; Don Sabrowski, Secretary; and, John Perusek, Treasurer.

Director Julie Nania moved and Director Joellen Fonken seconded approval of the recommended slate of officers as presented. The motion carried.

Treasurer's Report – Treasurer John Perusek said he had nothing further to report than was included in the packet. President McPhail thanked him for working with staff through the budget process.

General Manager's Report – General Manager Sonja Chavez reviewed the items in her written report included in the packet. As part of the Watershed Management Planning process, Ms. Chavez asked Water Resources Project Manager Bailey Friedman to review the GEI Wetlands Assessment and make

recommendations to finalize the report for public distribution. Ms. Friedman gave a brief Power Point presentation and noted that there were some areas in need of clarification in how threats to wetlands were represented in GEI's assessment. The Board agreed with Ms. Friedman's concerns and with her recommendation to follow up with GEI for clarification. It was agreed that when it comes time to address specific areas of concern, it would be important to address the problem areas where the District can get the biggest bang for its buck and that the District stay true to what was said that in the beginning about its plans to use this assessment as presented to the county and other stakeholders.

General Manager Chavez noted that Ms. Friedman will also be assuming the WMP project management duties, including overseeing completion of the Phase 2 Final Report and coordination of education and outreach.

WQCD Regulation 87 Update – General Manager Chavez reported that the Dredge and Fill Stream Mitigation workshop was well attended with around 100 people in the room and a lot more online listening to the seminar. Ms. Chavez said the District can share links with updates about the program with Board members if they are interested. She said there were questions and a good deal of discussion about whether there should be different methodologies used for high elevation streams versus plains stream systems with a lot of consensus from stakeholders present at the meeting. The process will continue and it's expected that public input will be taken beginning in January 2025 with the rulemaking process to begin in August 2025.

Wet Meadows Program – General Manager Chavez reported that the program held their end-of-season meeting on October 22nd. One outcome of this meeting is that there will be a need to hire two Summer Seasonal Employees and the District budget was revised to include \$32,000 to cover these seasonal employees at an hourly rate of \$21. Director Joellen Fonken asked if \$21 per hour is really a competitive rate for these positions? Ms. Chavez replied that she thought it was considering they get significant hands-on experience as they are working to complete their degrees and also a housing stipend.

Director Rosemary Carroll moved and Director John Perusek seconded approval of hiring two 2025 seasonal employees for the Wet Meadows Program at a cost not to exceed a total of \$32,000 to be reimbursed through the 2025 BLM Cooperative Agreement. The motion carried.

The Board also discussed the need for a utility terrain vehicle (UTV) to haul rock to Wet Meadows restoration sites along with a trailer to transport the UTV. The Wet Meadows program has been using a UTV and trailer on loan from either Colorado Parks and Wildlife or the National Parks Service, but this option will no longer be available. General Manager Chavez noted that if the District purchased the vehicle and trailer, it would only be driven by UGRWCD staff who will have received special training in its operation. There would also need to be insurance coverage for the vehicle and drivers. While the Board agreed with the need for such a UTV and trailer, there was a question about the maintenance costs and whether or not it might be better just to rent such a UTV and trailer when needed. Water Resources Technician Ari Yamaguchi will compile rental estimates to compare with the estimated cost of purchasing the equipment.

Drought Contingency Planning (DCP) – The stakeholder meetings were well attended, and the process is moving forward. Agricultural producers are the last group of stakeholders that need to meet. General Manager Chavez suggested that perhaps DCP could be the topic of the District’s presentation at the annual Stockgrowers meeting in December 2024.

Education and Outreach – The District sponsored the Gunnison Rotary Club’s fishing tournament at the end of September and photos of the winners were shared with the Board. Administrative Assistant Sue Uerling also reported that a new Mini-Grant application from the Crested Butte Nordic Council had been submitted. She encouraged the Education and Outreach Committee members who had not cast a vote on the application to please respond as soon as possible.

Scientific Endeavors – Director Rosemary Carroll said that she did not have much to report but that the presentation by the Applied Research Team would be of interest to the scientific community. She noted that currently everyone is using their own forecasting data systems which makes it hard to compare results across the board. For the scientific community, she said they are going to want to see data for much longer terms, like for decades. She said the Applied Research Team’s reports could be useful in the future.

9. MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

General Manager Sonja Chavez announced that the **Colorado Water Congress Annual Convention** will be held at the Hyatt Regency in Aurora January 29-31st. Because this conference tends to sell-out of hotel rooms at the Hyatt, she recommended that Board members should indicate their interest in going now so that hotel reservations can be made. If it turns out that someone is unable to attend, the District can cancel the hotel rooms up until the week before the conference. Directors Stacy McPhail, Julie Nania, John Perusek and Don Sabrowski are interested in attending at this time. If any other Board members are interested, they should contact the District as soon as possible.

General Manager Chavez noted that the District will hold its **Board and Staff Holiday Party** immediately following the November meeting on November 25, 2024. Board members, staff and their significant others are invited. Please RSVP for the party as soon as possible.

Director Julie Nania reported that the **Headwaters Conference** held at Western Colorado University October 25 and 26th was well attended with 65 attendees at the workshop, 90 attendees for the conference and an additional 30 persons online. She said that Robert Sakata did a great job facilitating the workshop and she thanked Directors Stacy McPhail and Andy Spann for their help. President McPhail commended Julie for a very successful conference.

10. CITIZEN COMMENTS

No citizen comments were brought forth. Tom Rozman was thanked for his attendance.

11. FUTURE MEETINGS

A list of meetings was included in the Board packet.


12. SUMMARY OF MEETING ACTION ITEMS

- Staff will further research total costs for the purchase or rental of a Utility Vehicle and trailer for the Wet Meadows program.
- Staff will seek input from agricultural producers on the Drought Contingency Planning process. Location and event date to be determined.

13. ADJOURNMENT

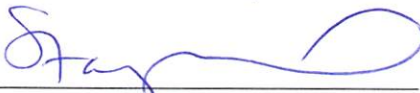
President Stacy McPhail adjourned the October 28, 2024 Board meeting at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Don Sabrowski, Secretary

APPROVED:



Stacy McPhail, President

