

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District
Regular Meeting Minutes of the Board of Directors
January 27, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.**

The Board of Directors of the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District (UGRWCD) conducted a regular meeting on Monday, January 27, 2025 at 5:30 p.m. in the District office, 210 West Spencer Avenue, Suite A, Gunnison, CO, 81230 and via Zoom video/teleconferencing.

Board members present: Rosemary Carroll, Joellen Fonken (via Zoom), Rebie Hazard (Via Zoom), Stacy McPhail, Julie Nania, John Perusek, Camille Richard, Don Sabrowski, Andy Spann and Brooke Zanetell.

Others present:

Amanda Aulenbach, Wet Meadows Project Manager
Clark Burton, Barrick Gold Corporation (formerly Pitch Mine)
Sonja Chavez, UGRWCD General Manager (via Zoom)
Mitch Dahlke, US Forest Service
Bailey Friedman, UGRWCD Water Projects Manager
Jesse Kruthaupt, Trout Unlimited
Ned Lundvall, Arcadis (via Zoom)
John McClow, UGRWCD General Counsel (via Zoom)
Luke Mecklenburg, Colorado Attorney General's Office (via Zoom)
Beverly Richards, Senior Program Manager/Office Manager
Bob Robbins, Robbins Ranch (via Zoom)
Sue Uerling, UGRWCD Admin. Asst/Communications Support Specialist
David Wykoff, Barrick Gold Corporation (formerly Pitch Mine)
Ari Yamaguchi, UGRWCD Water Resources Technician (via Zoom)

1. Call to Order

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

2. Agenda Approval

Director John Perusek moved and Director Julie Nania seconded approval of the agenda. The motion carried.

3. Oath of Office Administration

Judge Kellie Starritt administered the oath of office to Camille Richard, who will fill Michelle Pierce's remaining term for Division 1, Hinsdale County.

4. Consent Agenda Items

President McPhail asked if anything needed to be removed for further discussion from the Consent Agenda Items. None were brought forth.

Director Rosemary Carroll moved and Director Julie Nania seconded approval of the Consent Agenda. The motion carried.

5. Presentation by David Wykoff and Clark Burton, Pitch Mine Reclamation Project, Barrick Gold Corporation

Dave Wykoff, Pitch Mine Closure Manager, and Clark Burton, Director of Closure Operations, for Barrick Gold updated the UGRWCD Board regarding their closure operations for the uranium mine located 6.5 miles east/northeast of Sargents. It was noted that the site is above 10,000 feet in elevation with no access to any power grid. They reported that Pinnacle Partners operated a uranium mine at the site from 1959 to 1972 and the Homestake Mining operated an open pit mine from 1979 to 1984. Barrick Gold acquired Homestake Mining in 2001. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) and the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety have provided oversight of the reclamation and closure process.

Barrick has instituted the following engineering solutions towards reclamation: regrading waste rock to prevent ponding/infiltration; capping of residual low-grade ore stockpiles; plugging underground Pinnacle Portal to address radium and reduce mobilization of uranium; uranium passivation through phosphate injection; diversions implemented to minimize infiltration into mineralized fault zone. The underground mine portal has been plugged. A limestone quarry at the site has been reclaimed and revegetated and the north pit tension crack has been regraded and revegetated. They said that concentration discharge from the site has consistently met the aquatic life standard of 2,000 ug/L for uranium in their discharge permit. In 2015, there was a change in Marshall Creek's use taking their permit limit from 2,000 ug/L to the 30 ug/L drinking water supply uranium standard. The temporary modification standard is set to expire in 2025 and Barrick has updated their "Alternatives Analysis" and resubmitted it to CDPHE in October 2024. The Water Quality Control Commission rulemaking hearing for Pitch's request for a Discharge Specific Variance is scheduled for June 2026.

They noted also that the Saguache County Commissioners adopted ordinances restricting drilling of alluvial wells within 200 feet of Marshall Creek and a conservation easement was established on the Irby Ranch to ensure that no future development and no new municipal wells could be drilled within 200 feet of Marshall Creek in the future. In addition, shallow domestic alluvial wells in the town of Sargents generally have poor water quality with evidence of E.coli. At this time, 32 of those shallow wells have been identified by Pitch for replacement (i.e, drilling deeper into the bedrock aquifer). In 2024, 17 wells were drilled and 15 more will be drilled in 2025. Pump installation and tie-in will follow and the existing alluvial wells, some of which were hand-dug back in the early 1900's will be plugged. Saguache County Commissioners have considered the feasibility of building a community water and waste-water treatment

systems and have great concerns about who would construct it and oversee the ongoing operations of these systems. Ongoing in-stream water quality sampling continues in Marshall Creek, Indian Creek and Tomichi Creek.

Mr. Wykoff shared a table that compared pre-mining concentrations of uranium with current concentrations on Indian Creek which showed that concentrations have been steadily declining since 2018.

Director Julie Nania indicated her understanding was that there was mining activity up there prior to 1959 and Mr. Wykoff answered that it was just exploratory excavation and very minor mining. Director Nania surmised that their table included data only from prior to Homestake Mining, but not prior to all mining. Director Rosemary Carroll asked for further details about the dots represented on the time table graph and asked if uranium concentrations peak in the spring. Mr. Wykoff responded that concentrations peak at low flow (less dilution) but the overall mass load of uranium peaks at high flow. Mr. Burton noted that they had done significant research to help them understand the source of the uranium and have concluded that there are three main sources; one being the underground workings of the mine at the Chester Fault and the other two being two different waste rock facilities.

Barrick is now going through the Discharger Specific Variance (DSV) process to secure a regulatory pathway if the underlying water quality standards cannot be met. This process would be to determine an alternate effluent limit (AEL) and define discharge permit limits.

Director Brooke Zanetell asked about the likelihood of moving forward with a water and sewage treatment system and Mr. Wykoff said they are really not moving forward with that option but instead are focusing on drilling the deeper wells through the bedrock due to Saguache County's concern over cost of long-term operation and maintenance costs. He noted that any septic systems close to the new wells have been encased so that there is no transference between the septic systems and wells. He said that it is a huge improvement but is also a huge project that they are about halfway through at this time.

Director Julie Nania commented that it seems to her they should continue with their mitigation efforts since the uranium levels are coming down slowly. She said it seems extreme to take away a drinking water basin when their efforts appear to be gradually improving the water quality in recent years. She asked why they would not continue down that path. Mr. Wykoff responded that it becomes an effort of diminishing returns and that they predict in time the graph will flatten out as there is natural uranium found in the watershed. Mr. Burton said that regardless of what they do, he does not feel they will be able to meet the CDHPE drinking water standards but that thanks to their efforts, the water quality is better than it was previously. In response to Director Nania's question about their timeframe for how long they will continue their current efforts, Mr. Burton replied that they look at a window of 20 years for data comparison and the DSV is typically reviewed and/or renewed at regular intervals about every five to 10 years.

Director John Perusek reported that he worked at that mine in the past and said then it was essentially a

CynD mine on a limestone bed and he wondered if an effort had been made to seal off that area. Mr. Wykoff replied that they did plug the portal to the underground workings of the mine, which caused the underground pit to fill with water. Mr. Burton said that the Chester Fault is actually a fault zone over 400 feet wide with several outlets, so it is pretty much impossible to seal that off. He said that uranium and other ores that exist naturally are still leaking into the system from the underground workings but that most of them are leaking to the north.

Mr. Burton said that as they have proceeded through the DSV process, they got two main comments in feedback from the CDPHE. One, that Barrick's list of alternatives was not a comprehensive list and two, that they were not following the DSV guidance to the letter. Mr. Burton explained that when they initially submitted their list of alternatives for meeting the standards, they had purposely omitted alternatives that they felt were either similar or inferior to the ones they did submit. So, in October, they went back and submitted all of the alternatives that were initially on the drawing board. He said that they are also now following the DSV guidance more closely. They will continue to proceed through the DSV technology test, economic test and other considerations test. With the economics test, they look at substantial impacts to the profit, liquidity, and solvency of Barrick Gold as well as any adverse impacts on the community, surrounding area, or economic impacts at the State level, such as employment opportunities in an area that already has limited opportunities. He noted that the costs of many of the alternatives may be disproportionate to the environmental and human health benefits.

With the "other considerations" test they looked at the risks associated with treatment byproducts, including transporting concentrated radiological waste, especially since Colorado does not have a certified waste disposal site for such waste. They also considered resource consumption, greenhouse gas and other air emissions for the alternatives. Finally, they reviewed possible safety risks associated with implementing alternatives.

General Manager Sonja Chavez asked if they had ever done testing at the CDOT well. Mr. Wykoff responded that he did not believe they had ever done testing at that well but that they could do so if that was of interest to the District. Sonja responded that it was her understanding from the Irby's or Paul Mowry that if they don't intentionally irrigate a certain parcel it has negative consequences on the CDOT house well near the CDOT barn.

Director Joellen Fonken explained that there was a capped uranium disposal structure about four miles east of her residence at Hartman Rocks and she wondered how water quality levels at that disposal area would compare to the data they are collecting for Indian or Marshall creeks. Mr. Wykoff said he does not have that data immediately available and Mr. Burton offered that Barrick could do a comparison if they had the data from the Gunnison mining site. Director Fonken asked Director Perusek if he had any insight on this and Director Perusek replied that he felt the levels would be lower at Indian and Marshall Creeks than at the former Gunnison mining site.

They concluded their presentation by saying they encourage comments in preparation for the WQCC

hearing in June 2026 and they invited the District to come tour the mine site in the spring. They also said they would like to come back to the Board with another update in the fourth quarter of 2025 and they provided their emails as follows for further questions or comments: Dave Wykoff at <mailto:dwykoff@barrick.com> and Clark Burton at cburton@barrick.com

Director Julie Nania commented that she feels Barrick's pursuit of a DSV is a little preemptive since they are making progress towards meeting the standard and that she would like to see them continue with their current efforts. General Manager Chavez commented that the WQCC does not like to see temporary modifications "hanging out there" for too long and that a DSV doesn't remove the requirement that Barrick continue to work on improving water quality. Mr. Burton reported that the commission required that Barrick move forward with filing a DSV as part of the approval for the temporary modification that they are currently under. Director Nania pointed out that they are actually meeting the standard for part of the year at Marshall Creek and that given more time, perhaps they would be able to meet the standard year-round. Mr. Burton responded that on Indian Creek, though, they will not be able to reach the standard for a very long time – maybe 400-500 years. Director Nania asked if the two creeks could be segmented out separately so that they could still be working on Marshall Creek. Mr. Burton said that this was a good question that he could check on further.

All parties agreed that it would be helpful for the District Board to visit the site in the spring.

6. Basin Water Supply Report

Senior Program Manager Beverly Richards reported that thanks to the cold temperatures, the snowpack in the basin has remained pretty steady and above average since the end of November but that conditions are starting to get warmer and dryer. She noted that for the first time this season, the SNOTEL average snowpack for the basin fell to under 100 percent this week. She did attend a webinar, however, where they reported that the Upper Gunnison Basin receives the most snowfall when there are atmospheric river systems moving in from the west and the National Weather Service is predicting some weaker atmospheric rivers in February, so hopefully, precipitation will improve then. Right now, the soil moisture content is still good and the area reservoirs are at their normal averages for this time of year.

7. General Counsel Update

Legislative Review – General Counsel John McClow reported that so far only one water bill of interest to the District has been brought forward, SB 25-040, which proposes a task force to study the future of severance tax and water funding. He anticipates that there will be a number of other water bills proposed in the next few weeks so it is likely that he will commence Legislative Committee meetings on Friday, February 7th at 8 a.m. It was explained for the new members that this committee typically meets on Friday mornings at 8 a.m. during the Legislative Session and that staff will send out a Zoom registration link that can be used for all of the meetings. Director Stacy McPhail offered to serve on this committee.

Policy Update – Counselor McClow has been working to assemble a current and relevant collection of Board policies to include in a manual for all directors. In doing so, he has found a number of policies that either need to be updated to current practices or eliminated altogether as they no longer pertain to District operations.

First, he presented the current Mission and Values statement and said that the Directors may want to take time to consider these. General Manager Chavez suggested that these be taken up during a Strategic Planning retreat planned for 2025.

The second policy he addressed was the “Electronic Participation” policy. He explained that this policy was instituted during the Covid pandemic when the Board could not meet in person and certain conditions were included that the Board is no longer following, including requiring that the Board President approve any electronic participation. The consensus of the Directors was that the conditions should be stricken from the policy but the language that Board members are encouraged to participate in person should be left in the policy.

Director Julie Nania moved and Director Camille Richard seconded adoption of the “Electronic Participation” policy with the updated language provided in Counselor McClow’s email. The motion carried.

The next Policy addressed by Counselor McClow was the “Decision-Making Between Board and Attorney.” Mr. McClow noted that the policy was adopted in 2001 when the District did not have a full-time attorney on staff, so the policy is no longer relevant and he recommended rescinding the policy. President McPhail responded that the rescission was “long overdue.”

Director John Perusek moved and Director Rebie Hazard seconded rescinding the “Decision-Making Between Board and Attorney” policy. The motion carried.

The next Policy addressed by Counselor McClow was the “Reserve Policy” which currently states that the District shall set aside three percent annually for the reserve. Since this has not been pursued exactly, Mr. McClow said the Board can ignore the limit; re-adopt the policy and then stick to the three percent limit each year; or modify the policy in terms of the limit or language. In response to questions about how the reserve has varied, Treasurer John Perusek said it had grown on average approximately 6.5 percent annually, except for 2023 when reserve funds were used to purchase the other half of the Spencer Building complex.

Counselor McClow explained that when the reserve was initially created, it was anticipated that the reserve would be used to resist transbasin diversions and to set aside funds for a large project that might be of interest to the District. President McPhail wondered if the policy “takes care of itself” and therefore, the District does not need a reserve policy. Director Brooke Zanetell noted that although presently there is no threat of a transbasin diversion, she said she would be in favor of

keeping the spirit of the original language with it now reading the reserve is important to support eliminating any new threats to the basin as she feels there are more nuanced threats to water coming now and in the future. Director Camille Richard asked if in the financial policies there were any specific instructions on how the reserve fund is invested or managed. General Manager Chavez replied that while there is no specific language, the reserve fund is managed with the goal of keeping it stable and growing it whenever possible. Ms. Chavez also explained that items that may impact the reserve include the District's commitment to support the \$2.2M USGS irrigation return flow study. She is committed to continuing to fundraise to reduce impacts to our reserve fund balance over the next few years. Counselor McClow also explained that when the policy was initially passed, there were Board members who felt that the mill levy should be raised to support a healthy reserve and others who felt the mill levy should be maintained or reduced as long as the reserve was meeting the three percent goal. After further discussion about a possible cap or language changes with respect to threats or large District projects, the consensus of the Board was that this policy should be tabled for further discussion at the next Board meeting with staff providing some options for consideration.

Next, Counselor McClow referred to a paragraph supported by the Board in the past regarding "Travel Reimbursement." He reported that senior management has now included rules in the revised Employee Handbook for staff travel, and therefore, a policy is recommended that applies to the Board of Directors. General Manager Chavez listed several travel conditions being considered for the policy including that the District has been paying for one alcoholic beverage for Board members and one special guest when the staff and the board meet as a group for dinner. Otherwise, she said she recommends that the policy state that the District will not pay for alcoholic beverages purchased by individual Board members. She also referenced the US General Service Administration (GSA) link as a reference for per diem rates considered reasonable for meals and accommodations across Colorado. She reported that Board members should be using the District's Reimbursement Request form and offered that staff will send out the 2025 version of the form since the IRS mileage reimbursement rate changed this year. As a government entity, Board members will need to submit Reimbursement Request forms within 45 days of their travel. She also said that Board members traveling should try to use the most cost-efficient means and direct routes as possible. She said that Google maps will provide Board members with the exact mileage for the direct route from their door to the business meeting and that this is the figure that should be used for mileage reimbursement. Staff will provide a draft of this policy at the next Board meeting.

8. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer John Perusek referred to the treasurer's report memo included in the packet and specifically pointed out the two graphs showing what the reserve has done over the past five years for both the general fund and the Water Activity Enterprise. He noted that both had grown steadily by about 6.5 percent and that the funds were safely invested to earn interest. General Manager Chavez said that in the past, there were often invoices or disbursement requests that came in at the

end of the year that then ended up being accounted for in the next fiscal year. She and Beverly Richards have implemented a practice of billing partners (e.g., cloudseeding, water quality/quantity monitoring, etc.) at the beginning of the year rather than at the end of the year which was the District's previous practice. The District is also more closely following outstanding invoices and disbursements to do a better job of trying to get funds accounted for in the year they were budgeted. Finally, General Manager Chavez noted that the District's grant programs projects are taking longer than anticipated to implement due to delays in engineering or availability of contractors for implementation (likely associated with significant IRA and BIL funding driving demand for water resource projects). This has meant that grant expenses are being pushed into subsequent years and that it may appear as though the District is taking money out of the reserve on a regular basis when it is really just expending unspent funds from a previous fiscal year. Director Andy Spann requested a report on grant funds that were not paid in the budgeted year to see if the reserve line might end up being flatter. Staff will try to come up with such a report.

9. General Manager and Committee Reports

PROJECTS & FUNDRAISING

B2E Grant: The Gunnison Conservation District was awarded a grant from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Bucket 2 Environmental (B2E). The District is the primary subcontractor and will be providing technical expertise, grant administration and training on government grant administration for the Conservation District. General Manager Chavez reported that the exact timing and payment for this grant is currently unknown since the Trump administration has frozen federal grant funding, so stay tuned.

NRCS: The District took part in a Water Management Webinar Entity (WME) by NRCS. Ms. Chavez said the District doesn't qualify as a WME but wanted Board members and the public to be aware of it in case they came across someone who does qualify.

TLUG: The two-year terms were up for three of the Taylor Local Users Group representatives as follows: Roark Kiklevich representing wade fishing interests; David Fisher representing property owner interests; and Andy Spann representing irrigation interests. All three of these representatives submitted emails or letters saying they were interested in continuing to serve and renewing their terms. The District also received a letter from Patrick Plumley who expressed interest in serving as the wade fishing representative. Mr. Plumley's letter was read aloud for the Board and several Board members noted that he had good experience with fishing interests, but also as a former Registered Geologist and Certified Engineering geologist who conducted hydrogeologic and groundwater investigations and analysis of potential impacts to water resources for a series of major hard rock, open pit and underground mines. He also has experience performing engineering geologic and geotechnical investigations for the design and construction of large civil engineering projects, such as dams, pipelines, mines and power plants. Directors Spann and Sabrowski both noted that Roark Kiklevich has served for many years as a TLUG

representative and knows a lot about the operations of Taylor Reservoir and understands the challenges in managing streamflows for all users. Director Sabrowski pointed out that it's easy to consider all users interests when there is good snowpack and runoff but that it becomes much more difficult during dry years. During dry years, it is particularly helpful to have someone with a lot of experience in dealing with the whole group. After some discussion, the consensus was that Mr. Plumley should be encouraged to attend the TLUG meetings, since they are open to all, and Director Fonken offered that perhaps Mr. Plumley might consider joining the Gunnison River Festival Board of Directors. Since he was also at the initial Drought Contingency Planning meeting, he should also be encouraged to stay involved there.

Director Julie Nania moved and Director Rosemary Carroll seconded the appointment of Andy Spann to represent irrigation interests on the Taylor Local Users Group. Director Spann abstained from the vote. The motion carried.

Director Brooke Zanetell moved and Director Camille Richard seconded the appointment of Roark Kiklevich to represent wade fishing interests on the Taylor Local Users Group. The motion carried.

Director Rosemary Carroll moved and Director Camille Richard seconded the appointment of David Fisher to represent property owners interests on the Taylor Local Users Group. The motion carried.

Director John Perusek asked if Mr. Plumley could be considered for the City of Gunnison opening on the Board of Directors. Division 8 requires that the representatives live inside the city limits and Mr. Plumley lives and owns property just outside the limits.

President Stacy McPhail said she wanted to recognize the great service that former Director Mike Rogers provided to the Board of Directors and wished him well with his move. She also asked that Board members be thinking of someone to replace Director Rogers and that she would like to see someone that has experience with the City of Gunnison's water and wastewater treatment plant. Director Julie Nania also expressed an interest in finding someone with land-use regulations experience.

Watershed Management Planning Report – Water Projects Manager Bailey Friedman reported that she met today with GEI to discuss their final scope of work with respect to the machine learning process. Ms. Friedman said she distributed the WMP Phase II draft report in December to the committee and was awaiting comments from the committee on the report, which is due next Monday.

Funding Workshop – Ms. Friedman reported she is in the planning stages of putting together the “Upper Gunnison Basin Water Funding Opportunities Workshop” to educate the community on funding opportunities at the District, federal, state and local levels. This has been tentatively set for Tuesday, March 25, 2025 at the Gunnison Public Library from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Ms. Friedman has

set up a Google registration QR Code to get more information about what attendees hope to learn. Director Julie Nania asked if it would be possible to record the workshop for those who cannot be in attendance that day.

Grant Committee Report – Senior Program Manager Beverly Richards reported on grant activities.

For the **2023 Grant Program**, 18 grants were awarded totaling \$288,487. Five awards were declined primarily due to the fact that they were not ready. As of January 27, 2025 the District has 10 completed projects under the 2023 Grant Program with three projects still ongoing with approved extensions to 2025. The amount carried forward into the 2025 budget from the 2023 Grant Program was approximately \$46,670.

For the **2024 Grant Program**, 17 grants were awarded for a total of \$260,606 and two were declined totaling \$14,750. As of today, the District has three completed projects under the 2024 Grant Program. There is one completed project requiring some additional information for the reimbursement, and 11 ongoing projects that will continue into 2025. The amount carried forward into the 2025 budget from the 2024 cycle was approximately \$208,330. Ms. Richards noted that 2025 grant applications are due by 5 p.m. on February 14, 2025.

Education and Outreach Report – Administrative Assistant/Communications Specialist Sue Uerling referred to her memo in the packet and said there have been a couple of items that have come up since she prepared the memo. She reported that the District is sponsoring the “Ice Masters” ice fishing tournament at Taylor Reservoir on Saturday, February 22, 2025. Staff and Board were each given one of the winter stocking caps produced for the tournament that include the District’s logo. Ms. Uerling reported that the fishing tournament is full with just over 100 registrants and that Rory Birdsey is giving participants the stocking caps, rack cards and water bottles and displaying banners all with the District’s logo. In addition, he is highlighting the District's mission on their social media platforms.

Ms. Uerling also reported that she has had some preliminary contact with the organizers of the CB Public Policy Forum to be held this summer. An early news report noted that the forum will include a speaker covering Colorado River issues. Director Julie Nania said they are hoping to secure Rebecca Mitchell of the Upper Colorado River Commission to be the speaker for this session. The Education Committee did set aside funding to support this project.

Director Camille Richard said that an ice fishing tournament is also planned for Lake San Cristobal and she wondered if there might be any District funding available to support it. Ms. Uerling said that the Mini-Grant Program could provide up to \$500 towards the tournament if approved by the committee. And, if the tournament will be held annually, it may be something the committee wants to include in sponsorship funding for the next fiscal year.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - General Manager Chavez said in the interest of time, she would prepare a report on the CRWCD's Board meeting to present at the next UGRWCD Board meeting.

UGRWCD Draft Comments – Dredge and Fill – General Manager Chavez reported that the District did submit comments on the proposed regulation that basically mimicked the input provided by the Colorado Water Congress. Ms. Chavez said there were three additional comments made by the District primarily dealing with specific use of Regional General Permit Number 5 for ditch construction and maintenance activities. In addition, she wanted to remind CDPHE of the commitment made to locate staff on the western slope and to conduct outreach/stakeholder engagement across the western slope. WQCD had made a commitment to make in person presentations, but she was disappointed that although these individuals were lined up well in advance to be present both at the GBRT meeting and the CRWCD meeting, the presentations ended up having to be virtual.

Adoption of Employee Handbook – General Manager Chavez said senior staff had been working on “cleaning up” the employee handbook and had included the following changes as presented in the packet:

- On the Colorado Retirement Association plan, it notes that in addition to the 457B plan, a Roth-IRA plan option was added.
- With respect to expense reimbursements, staff also must submit their request and receipts within 45 days.
- Cell phones purchased by the District will remain the property of the District upon the staff member's termination or resignation .
- As part of the CARES Act, employees can choose to put a large lump sum of money towards their student loan debt and then have the monthly cost of the lump sum withheld directly from their paychecks. This up-front payment saves the employee interest costs thereby paying down the loan quicker. The CARES Act expires in December 2025.
- A Paid Time Off (PTO) cash-out policy was added which allows staff to cash in a portion of their accumulated PTO hours to use for example on medical expenses, a vacation, or putting additional money into their retirement plan (pre-tax). Staff will still be required to take sufficient PTO hours for their own well-being and this will be a requirement for approval of PTO cash out.
- The compensatory time off policy was amended to only apply to full-time Wet Meadows field staff who at times are required to work significant hours doing physical labor in the field. The reason for providing compensatory time is to minimize potential for accidents or injury. Other salaried staff will not be provided compensatory time off.
- Office hours and work breaks were clarified.
- The remote working policy was also clarified and will be given in limited exceptions.
- The District Vehicle usage policy was clarified and staff are required to use District vehicles when conducting District business and limit personal vehicle use when possible.
- A bereavement leave policy was added to allow staff members to take up to five days paid leave .

- A policy was added stating that the District is a pet friendly workplace and a separate memo will be given to staff who choose to bring their pet to work outlining the guidelines and requiring them to sign a pet agreement.
- Once approved, each staff member will sign and date a form noting their understanding of the Employee Handbook.

Director Camille Richard moved and Director Julie Nania seconded adoption of the amended Employee Handbook dated 2025. The motion carried.

Ag Return Flow Update – General Manager Chavez reported that representatives from the USGS will be present at the next Board meeting to review their study findings and next steps. In the meantime, staff and Board members found the USGS graph of the gain and loss periods of water interesting and felt there were unanswered questions about the timing, since it didn't match up with the 10-12 year drought cycle. It was noted that there was a large amount of irrigated land up on the East River during the graphed period that was converted to other uses so perhaps this would explain some of the data. Director Carroll said she felt this was important information to convey to the USGS. She also said an invitation would be made to the Stockgrowers Association to come to the February District Board meeting if they would like to hear more about the study results thus far.

Gunnison Basin Roundtable Report - General Manager Chavez noted that the majority of the Roundtable meeting was taken up by the Water Quality Control Commission reviewing the Dredge and Fill draft language. She said no funding requests were presented this time.

Gunnison River Festival (GRF) Update – General Manager Chavez said the GRF has hired Hayden Daiber as the new Director of the River Festival. Ms. Chavez said she is very enthusiastic about the festival, and has been a river guide and has website design and social media experience.

On a different note, Ms. Chavez reported that the GRF bank account at Gunnison Savings and Loan (GSL) was compromised and a couple of attempts were made to electronically withdraw funds from the account to pay credit card bills. Two payment attempts were successful and were caught by Beverly Richards. Those charges are being investigated by GSL and the funds from that were withdrawn will be returned to the account. In the meantime, GSL recommended closing the existing account and opening a new one with a different account number and they were able to update the new account so that approved staff will have the ability to check the account online for any suspicious activity.

Wet Meadows Program Report – Wet Meadows Program Manager Amanda Aulenbach reported that last week, the District hosted the 2025 season planning session and that 24 people from 10 agencies attended. They will be advertising to hire two Restoration Technicians in February 2025, and have candidates selected by April 2025. Staff will purchase the UTV and trailer before May 2025 in order that the new technicians can be trained on the UTV. Water Resources Technician Ari Yamaguchi did interject that he heard from his contact who is helping with the government discount that Kubota is on a brief hold

right now, so the exact purchase date of the UTV is up in the air, but that he hopes it will be completed in time for the new technicians to be trained by May to be ready for the field season.

Ms. Aulenbach reported that there has been a five-part documentary series filmed called “Thinking Like Water”, which includes Bill Zeedyk and some of the other Wet Meadows restoration crew to be released in April or May 2025. She said the second episode is about the Wet Meadows Program and will premiere at the WCU theatre in mid-April, along with raffle prizes and several volunteer opportunities. Director Brooke Zanetell asked if these would be full-time positions and if the job announcement had gone out yet. Ms. Aulenbach replied that she is awaiting approval of the job description that she has written and that she hopes to have it out to the public by mid-February.

Scientific Endeavors - Director Rosemary Carroll said that she and her group are busy planning for the NEON campaign this summer, which stands for National Ecological Observatory Network, which is a group of scientists funded by the National Science Foundation spearheading Hyperspectral Analysis Flights over the Slate, Coal Creek, and Upper East Rivers. This was last done in 2018. New this year, there are also plans to include the Upper Taylor in these flights. These flights are to study vegetation health. Scientists in the area are also planning for Principal Investigator Conferences scheduled to begin next week.

10. Miscellaneous Matters – Water Project Manager Bailey Friedman noted that the WMP Committee is down to just two Board members with Director Mike Rogers’ resignation, so she asked what the process was for soliciting new members. President Stacy McPhail encouraged Director Camille Richard to consider which committees she might be interested in joining and noted that the WMP Committee will wrap up by the end of this year. It was also noted that the Education and Outreach Committee is now without a chair. Staff will send Director Richard a list of the committees and current members for her to consider.

Counselor John McClow reminded the Board to start thinking about the Mission and Values Statement for any updates. It was recommended by Manager Chavez that the board work on the mission and values statement as part of our strategic planning effort.

11. Citizen Comments – Luke Mecklenburg said he hopes to see several of the Board and staff at the Colorado Water Congress convention this week.

12. Future Meetings – A summary of upcoming meetings were listed in the packet. It was noted that the New Member Onboarding meeting on February 10th will be postponed until Director Rogers’ replacement is appointed. Director Camille Richard asked if it was acceptable to attend committee meetings by Zoom, and the response was “yes.”

13. Summary of Meeting Action Items

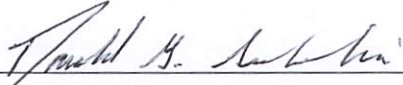
- As requested by Director Andy Spann, staff will prepare a summary of unexpended grant funds moved into subsequent budget years.
- Board members will review the Mission and Values Statements as part of the 2025 strategic planning.
- Staff will come up with some options for a Strategic Planning Retreat later in 2025 and present dates to the Board for consideration.
- Staff will prepare some policy language for options on managing reserve funds for the Board to consider.
- A tour of the Pitch Mine for Board and staff will be planned for some time after the first of June 2025.

General Manager Sonja Chavez reported that she will not be attending the Colorado Water Congress Convention starting on Wednesday due to being ill, so she offered that if there were anyone else willing to go in her place, the District has taken care of the registration fee and room and would cover travel expenses.


14. Adjournment of Regular Meeting

Board President Stacy McPhail adjourned the regular Board meeting on January 27, 2025 at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Don Sabrowski, Secretary



Stacy McPhail, President



