

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District
Regular Meeting Minutes of the Board of Directors
February 24, 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, February 24, 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, Stacy McPhail, Julie Nania (via Zoom), John Perusek, Don Sabrowski, Andy Spann and Brooke Zanetell (via Zoom).

Board members absent: Rebie Hazard and Camille Richard

Others present:

Amanda Aulenbach, Wet Meadows Project Director
Wayne Belcher, USGS (via Zoom)
Carleton Bern, USGS
Sonja Chavez, UGRWCD General Manager
Bailey Friedman, UGRWCD Water Projects Manager
Rachel Gidley, USGS
Jesse Kruthaupt, Trout Unlimited
John McClow, UGRWCD General Counsel
Luke Mecklenburg, Colorado Attorney General's Office (via Zoom)
Alana Nichols, UGRWCD Fellow
Greg Peterson, Peterson Ranch
Beverly Richards, Senior Program Manager/Office Manager
Bob Robbins, Robbins Ranch
Kaden Robbins, Robbins Ranch
Tom Rozman, Colorado Division of Water Resources
Sue Uerling, UGRWCD Admin. Asst/Communications Support Specialist
Cory Williams, USGS (via Zoom)
Ari Yamaguchi, UGRWCD Water Resources Specialist

1. **Call to Order**

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

2. **Agenda Approval**

Director Rosemary Carroll moved and Director Joellen Fonken seconded approval of the agenda. The motion carried.

3. 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 Joellen Fonken moved and Director Andy Spann seconded approval of the Consent Agenda. The motion carried.

4. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer John Perusek reported that one of the District's certificates of deposit (CD) was called and the proceeds were invested into another CD paying a higher rate of interest. He also reported that \$80,000 from the Spencer Building account was moved out of the checking account at Gunnison Bank and Trust Co. (zero interest account) and into the ColoTrust Fund where it will earn some interest.

5. General Counsel Update

Legislative Review – General Counsel John McClow reported that the Bureau of Reclamation cancelled the negotiating meeting for the renewal of the 1975 Taylor Park Reservoir Operation and Storage Exchange Agreement as all contracts are on hold for now at the federal level.

He also said the Colorado Water Congress Federal Affairs Committee announced this morning that federal funds previously allocated for Colorado water projects that had been frozen by the new administration are to be released for their original purpose, including the Shoshone Water Rights Preservation project. Mr. McClow said he had not seen a listing of all of the grant funds to be restored.

Counselor McClow also said at the state level most proposed legislation related to water issues has ground to a halt due to the state budget deficit.

6. General Manager and Committee Reports

Drought Contingency Planning (DCP): General Manager Sonja Chavez said that she and Alana Nichols have been working on comments on the draft DCP Mitigation Action Plan for the District. Ms. Chavez has also contacted the Bureau of Reclamation and is waiting for a response regarding the federal funding freeze and if the DCP grant is frozen.

Eddy Covariance Tower (Tower): Ms. Chavez offered technical support to the Department of Natural Resources for the Tower in Tomichi Creek. The tower will assist in field calculations of consumptive

use as current estimates made by the state are made with assumptions. Because there is currently no cell coverage in the area, data cannot be automatically downloaded, therefore, Water Resources Specialist Ari Yamaguchi will help with data downloads and some minor maintenance as needed.

Mt. Crested Butte Water and Sanitation District (CBWSD) Update: Mike Fabbre was on the agenda for this meeting to update the District on their plans for Meridian Lake Reservoir. He called just before the meeting saying he could not make it, so this presentation is tabled for the March 2025 Board meeting.

Colorado River District Update: General Manager Chavez reviewed her report included in the packet. There was discussion about CRWCD's contribution to the CMU Water Science Center and the goal of supporting on-going water research of importance to west slope water users and more broadly sharing results of those studies. Director Rosemary Carroll and General Manager Chavez discussed that there could be a need to find a communications specialist who understands the science behind all of the research and data who will be able to present it in a manner that can be comprehended by the general public. There was also discussion that this could open the door for Western Colorado University as well.

Dredge and Fill Legislation Update: Ms. Chavez said the Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) held a stakeholder meeting on the Dredge and Fill proposed legislation. The WQCC has provided the following link: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf04PRDfQ8xp8C6J9qz0Dj0oG7nPrefC8whKuGKfvqsW4OFtw/viewform> where anyone can provide comments. Ms. Chavez said she has been engaging with the Division to organize a stakeholder engagement meeting for in-person input on the western slope. More information will be shared as it becomes available.

Federal Funding Freeze Impacts: General Manager Chavez said the District is still trying to get answers from federal partners on the impacts of the new Trump Administration freeze on federal program funding that the District is managing. There was discussion that not only does the freeze have an impact on the District's partners but also has a trickle-down effect on spouses, local resource providers and the state and local economies. Ms. Chavez reported that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has lost 20 percent of its workforce in Colorado. Director Rosemary Carroll had heard that locally, seven of the 11 employees of the US Forest Service had been let go, although this could not be confirmed. Director Joellen Fonken asked if this would have an impact on permitting. Wet Meadows Project Director Amanda Aulenbach replied that the permits required for the Wet Meadows projects have already been cleared so the permits should not be impacted for current projects but could have impacts moving forward. She is still waiting on word from some of the other federal agency partners on funding freezes.

General Manager Chavez said the Gunnison Conservation District has had its funds frozen, including funds earmarked for salaries and funding for the newly awarded U.S. Bureau of Reclamation B2E grant. In addition, since President Trump issued a mandate that all federal workers were to return to their offices and not work remotely, the Gunnison Conservation District is also struggling to find space to work. They

already share office space with the US Forest Service and NRCS, so having everyone back in the office has resulted in them having to adjust their work day so that they have desks and equipment. They had checked with the District to see if there is space here but General Manager Chavez reported that all offices are full right now. She asked Board members to let her know if they know of any available space that might work for the Gunnison Conservation District.

7. **Upper Gunnison Basin Irrigation Return Flow Study Update by the USGS**

Rachel Gidley and Carleton Bern (USGS) attended in person to give a presentation about their study findings to date. A link to a report on this study can be found [here](#).

Cory Williams and Wayne Belcher also attended via Zoom. Ms. Gidley said the presentation will provide a quick study overview, 2024 accomplishments, published mass balance analysis, and next steps.

To date, their data collection includes sampling for continuous flow, temperature, discrete water quality, tributary/ditch analysis for flow measurements, both continuous and discrete; and the monitoring of five ground water wells for continuous levels and temperatures and discrete water quality. Sampling has continued monthly during non-irrigation season and weekly during irrigation.

Accomplishments for 2024 include the selection of additional sampling sites with permissions in progress; the identification of additional existing groundwater wells for analysis; the use of Open ET which provides daily data of the area that can be useful in the model; submittal of a successful proposal for Directed Cooperative Management Funds in the amount of \$100,000; and the publication of an Open File report about the project with an additional report to be completed in April 2025.

Next steps for the project include the continuation of sampling on the East River and going back to the weekly schedule in the spring. The USGS plans to complete reconnaissance of existing wells in late March or early April (pending landowner permission). They also plan to install surface-water flow sites on East River No. 1 Ditch and Slide Ditch in spring (pending landowner permission). Finally, the USGS is planning a field trip in late July to use thermal infrared and radon scanning along the East River to identify areas of groundwater return back to the river.

President Stacy McPhail said it was very exciting to see the data coming online and to learn what constraints they are working against. She offered that hopefully the District can help secure some of the landowner permissions. She thanked the USGS representatives for updating the Board and said she looks forward to getting the next round of results.

8. **Miscellaneous Matters**

Director Joellen Fonken asked if the Doppler Radar to be installed at Black Mesa was online yet. General Manager Chavez replied that she believes the Doppler Radar unit that the District was supposed to get

was deployed to a site in eastern Colorado since the site at Black Mesa was not able to be wired for electricity prior to the ground freeze. Ms. Chavez expressed frustration with the lack of communication from Western States Water Weather Intelligence Center and Advance Radar Company. She affirmed that she is committed to getting Doppler Radar deployed in the Upper Gunnison Basin and will be exploring alternatives over the next few months.

Director Don Sabrowski asked if the hydro plant at Taylor Reservoir was up and running as he had heard that Gunnison Electric Company was having trouble with one of the gates. General Manager Chavez replied that it was her understanding that they were able to fix the problem and that the generator is online. She said it is still on the docket for the Board to tour the operations sometime this summer and that staff will begin working on trying to secure a date and time.

Senior Program Manager Beverly Richards reported that the District received 14 grant applications totaling \$470,000 and noted that \$300,000 was budgeted for awards. She said there was one application that came in after the deadline but that the District is working with them outside of the grant program. Staff will be reviewing the grant applications this week and then the Grant Committee will meet on March 6th at 2 p.m. to review staff recommendations and make final funding awards.

9. Citizen Comments

There were no comments. Guests were thanked for attending.

10. Basin Water Supply Report

Senior Program Manager Beverly Richards reported that the snowpack for the month peaked just over 100 percent following the recent snowstorm but that as of today, the average snowpack and soil moisture content has fallen under 100 percent. The National Weather Service webinar she attended this morning reported that the forecast calls for warmer and drier conditions with much of the western slope moving into drought conditions. Most of the recent snowfalls have gone to the north.

Director Rosemary Carroll noted that it has been a strange year for weather conditions overall and she is hoping for a return to more normal conditions.

Director Don Sabrowski asked if there were any changes to the cloud seeding schedule related to avalanche concerns. Ms. Richards answered that “no” there were two cloud seeding events in January and typically cloud seeding is only called off if the conditions reach “extreme.” As of today, the avalanche danger conditions were listed at “considerable” for Crested Butte.

12. Future Meetings

A summary of upcoming meetings was listed in the packet. It was noted that the Legislative

Committee meeting for February 28, 2025 was cancelled. Directors were also reminded to mark their calendars for April 17th for the Colorado River District's "State of the River" dinner at the Fred Field Center. General Manager Chavez reported that a Doodle poll will go out soon to select a meeting date for the first TLUG meeting in March.

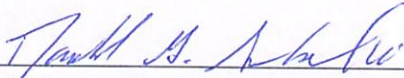
13. Summary of Meeting Action Items

- Staff will remind Mike Fabbre of Mt. Crested Butte Water and Sanitation to attend the March meeting.
- General Manager Chavez will continue to seek information on which of our grants are impacted by the federal funding freeze.
- Staff will work on linking to USGS' website and coordinating with the USGS on sharing results from the irrigation return flow study.
- A tour of the Pitch Mine and a tour of the Taylor Hydroelectric Plant for Board and staff will be planned for some time after the first of June 2025.

14. Adjournment of Regular Meeting

Board President Stacy McPhail adjourned the regular Board meeting on February 24, 2025 at 8:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Don Sabrowski, Secretary



Stacy McPhail, President

