



Upper Gunnison Drought Contingency Plan: Task Force

Minutes

January 15th, 2025

Task Force Attendees:

Cody Tusing (City of Gunnison)
Giulio Del Piccolo (Colorado Parks & Wildlife)
Heather Miller (NRCS)
Jesse Kruthaupt (Trout Unlimited)
Jon Hare (High Country Conversation Advocates)
Jonathan Houck (GCBODCC)
Lisa Brown (WWG)
Nathan Darnall (USFWS)
Steve Moore (CCWC)
Ryan White (GCOEM)
Scott Morrill (GCOEM)
Dayle Funka (USFS)
Lee Traynham (BOR)
Carolyn De Groot (Town of Crested Butte)
Brinnen Carter (National Park Service)
Shea Earley (Town of Crested Butte)

Staff/Consultants:

Stacy Beaugh (Strategic by Nature)
Carrie Padget (Harris Water Group)
Savannah Nelson (Sunshine Creatives)
Sonja Chavez (UGRWCD)
Sue Uerling (UGRWCD)
Bailey Friedman (UGRWCD)

I. Welcome and Goals for the Day:

Sonja Chavez (UGRWCD) opened the meeting acknowledging the steady progress made to date—particularly with respect to developing actionable drought mitigation strategies

and solidifying the group's communications and branding tools. She set the tone for the day's work, emphasizing that the focus would be on reviewing outcomes from the recent agricultural workshop and providing feedback on the brand book developed for the drought plan.

II. Introductions, Agenda Overview, and DCP Process Update:

Stacy Beaugh (Strategic By Nature) and Carrie Padgett (Harris Water Engineering) led the group through a review of the agenda and recent project milestones. Stacy announced that an important timeline extension had been secured from the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR).

Stacy noted that the current stage of the DCP process falls under the "Learn" phase. During this phase, the team is gathering input from agricultural producers and modeling potential actions. The goal is to transition next into prioritizing actions—based on what has been learned—followed by holding a public meeting in the summer. For the benefit of new attendees, Stacy provided a retrospective on completed work, including a technical assessment of available drought monitoring data, a vulnerability assessment of water users, and the initial stages of stakeholder outreach.

She also reviewed the revised planning calendar. Key milestones include Task Force and Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District review of the draft plan in April and May, a formal public comment period starting in June, and final plan submission to BOR in August. The team will be refining and sharing a finalized timeline shortly.

III. Agricultural Actions – Workshop Debrief and Discussion:

Stacy provided a comprehensive debrief on the agricultural stakeholder engagement process. Early in the DCP process, the team attempted 1:1 outreach with agricultural producers and invited them to participate in public meetings. However, turnout from the agricultural community was lower than expected. As a result, the team partnered with Hannah and the Stockgrowers to host a more targeted workshop in early December. This workshop followed the annual Stockgrowers meeting and drew approximately 14 participants.

The workshop utilized a "World Café" format featuring three rotating table discussions focused on the themes of Grazing Practices, Irrigation and Water Management, and Information Needs. At each table, participants were asked specific questions to elicit practical input grounded in their drought experiences and current management practices. Stacy noted that producers recalled 2002 and 2012 as particularly severe drought years and frequently referenced those periods in the discussion. It was clear that most producers are highly attuned to drought risks and are already taking proactive steps to manage those risks. The workshop facilitated valuable connections between agency representatives and producers. Sonja reflected that it was helpful to learn what data and tools producers already use and how that might connect with ongoing conversations around ASO (aerial snow observation) and other data collection methods.

Jonathan Houck (GCB OCC) observed that, despite the workshop, there are still producers who have not been reached. He suggested that outreach should continue on a

rolling basis and be repeated early and often throughout the process. Sonja agreed and acknowledged that not all producers belong to associations like the Stockgrowers, so additional outreach—especially 1:1 efforts involving local partners like Hannah and veterans’ contacts—will be essential to ensure their perspectives are captured. Hannah confirmed that the workshop revealed knowledge gaps that could be addressed through Extension programs. She found the event productive and emphasized the opportunity for CSU Extension to provide education that complements the DCP’s goals.

IV. Grazing Practices Table – Summary and Discussion:

Stacy provided a detailed summary of the input collected at the Grazing Practices table, where Lisa Brown and Jesse Kruthaupt served as note-takers. Participants discussed the need for more effective coordination with federal land managers like the U.S. Forest Service, as well as a desire for enhanced access to water sources—especially during drought. Jesse emphasized that water source development was one of the key themes, and that there are opportunities on both public and private lands.

The group discussed what drought-related actions might look like on the ground. These included fencing around water sources, riparian areas, and other vulnerable areas. The purpose of such fencing would be to reduce impacts from grazing during drought conditions. However, the group recognized that the feasibility and effectiveness of fencing would vary based on land ownership and site-specific factors.

Dayle Funka (USFS) shared that a long-term goal for the Forest Service is to develop water infrastructure away from streams to mitigate environmental degradation. She emphasized the need to be strategic in locating these developments so that they comply with permitting requirements and deliver long-term value. Dayle noted that while fencing is not always ideal, other investments—such as stock tanks or alternative water delivery systems—can reduce grazing pressure in riparian areas. A significant barrier, she added, is the lack of a range specialist on staff—a gap echoed by Lisa Brown, who noted that both public and private land managers are struggling with workforce shortages. Sonja added that UGRWCD has been advocating for increased funding to provide living wages for critical staff positions in the region.

V. Irrigation and Water Management Table – Summary and Discussion:

Sonja and Bailey Friedman facilitated this table. Stacy summarized the notes and emerging opportunities. A major theme was the lack of awareness among producers about available funding for drought resilience improvements, including programs offered by NRCS. Sonja mentioned that UGRWCD and Trout Unlimited will soon host a workshop to highlight such opportunities, including technical assistance and fiscal management support. Many producers are not fully aware of where or how to access these resources, and more outreach is needed.

Jesse advocated for improved Water Commissioner availability and suggested that technology could reduce administrative burdens. He noted that the City of Gunnison has already installed some cellular/radio sensors (e.g., at the “basketball ditch”) that provide real-time monitoring of water flows. These tools could be expanded and standardized

across the basin. Jonathan Houck added that upcoming funding, led by PEW and American Whitewater, may be able to support this type of infrastructure, especially for existing or planned projects.

Bailey reported that producers are also using creative strategies to respond to drought proactively. For instance, some producers melt snow and ice at headgates early in the season to trigger early runoff and help raise groundwater tables—a practice that might be worth modeling or supporting more formally in drought years.

VI. Information Table – Summary and Discussion:

The Information table discussion, facilitated by Hannah and Alana, focused on identifying information gaps and opportunities to expand education. Hannah highlighted the need for greater public understanding of water law, basic hydrology, and the structure of water governance. There was strong consensus on the need for more Water Commissioners and better communication between users and agencies. Stacy said the feedback aligned well with other stakeholder groups, reinforcing the need for comprehensive outreach.

One unresolved question was what participants meant when they mentioned the need for “coordination with Uncompahgre.” Stacy committed to following up to clarify this point. Suggested actions included making water records available on the drought plan website, working with real estate agents to inform new property owners about water issues, and developing onboarding materials for new local officials. There was also interest in programs like the WeCo annual water fluency course and using newsletters, radio spots, and regular email updates to keep stakeholders informed. A new idea discussed was appointing a basin-specific liaison—someone well-known and trusted by the community to serve as a central point of contact for information. Coordination with the CSU Extension Office was also suggested as a high-value partnership.

VII. Communications – Brand Book Presentation:

Savannah Nelson (Sunshine Creatives) presented the finalized brand book for the drought plan. The group officially adopted the name **Upper Gunnison Drought Plan**, which has a concise acronym, clear regional identification, and available domain name. The brand book outlines the plan’s visual identity, including logo usage, color palette, fonts, and layout guidelines. Savannah emphasized that the brand's core objective is to make complex information approachable and easily digestible for all audience types.

Looking ahead, the communications strategy includes three key deliverables: (1) a user-friendly action table, (2) a drought dashboard, and (3) communication plans tailored to different audiences. A new standalone website—**uppergunnisondroughtplan.org**—will serve as the primary platform for sharing these resources. This site will also feature audience-specific pages to support customized messaging.

Scott Morrill asked how the website would meet ADA accessibility standards. Sue Uerling offered to support Savannah in ensuring full compliance with HB 21-1110 and HB 24-1454, which outline accessibility requirements for public entities in Colorado. The communications subcommittee had previously debated whether to create a new website

or incorporate content into the District's existing site. The decision was made to proceed with a standalone site, which will still be linked from the District's homepage. The team was very pleased with the new logo, especially its use of a familiar mountain range as a visual identifier.

VIII. Adjournment:

The next Stakeholder Meeting will be Wednesday, February 26, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

This meeting was adjourned by Stacy Beaugh at 11:00 a.m.