

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District
Regular Meeting Minutes of the Board of Directors
April 28, 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, April 28, 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 (via Zoom), Joellen Fonken, Rebie Hazard, Stacy McPhail, John Perusek, Camille Richard, Don Sabrowski, Andy Spann, and Brooke Zanetell.

Board members absent: Julie Nania

Others present:

Amanda Aulenbach, UGRWCD Wet Meadows Project Director
Curtis Beutler, Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories (via Zoom)
Kate Burchenal, Airborne Snow Observatory
Sonja Chavez, UGRWCD General Manager
Bailey Friedman, UGRWCD Water Resource Project Manager
Dave Gochis, Airborne Snow Observatory (via Zoom)
Jesse Kruthaupt, Trout Unlimited (via Zoom)
John McClow, UGRWCD General Counsel
Mollie McGrann, Airborne Snow Observatory
Alana Nichols, UGRWCD Water Fellow
Beverly Richards, UGRWCD Senior Program Manager/Office Manager
Tom Rozman, Colorado Division of Water Resources
Robert Sakata, Colorado Department of Agricultural Water Policy Advisor (via Zoom)
Lynn Sikkink, Citizen
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 Rebie Hazard moved and Director John Perusek seconded approval of the agenda.
The motion carried.**

3. Consent Agenda Items

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

Director Camille Richard moved and Director Joellen Fonken seconded approval of the Consent Agenda. The motion carried.

4. Presentation by David Gochis and Kate Burchenal, Airborne Snow Observatory ASO)

Mr. Gochis and Ms. Burchenal gave a PowerPoint presentation to update the Board on recent flights over the Upper Gunnison River Basin. They highlighted the limitations of using SNOTEL stations, which are points on the landscape and not representative of the complexity of snowpack in the watershed. There was discussion about the motivation behind using ASO data and the differences in technology, focusing on the importance of monitoring and measuring the largest reservoir in Colorado and overall snowpack in the area.

Two flights will occur in 2025 in the East River Basin and Taylor River Basin. The first flight was flown on April 7, 2025, and a tentative second flight is scheduled for May 15, 2025. The first flight showed less snowpack in the basin in 2025 than in 2024 for both basins. However, in the East River basin, there was more snowpack measured in the middle and lower elevations in 2025 than in 2024.

North Fork of the Gunnison is a new survey area for ASO in 2025, with flights on March 27, 2025 and April 27, 2025.

On average, the relatively warm winter resulted in relatively shallow snowpack. The snowpack didn't develop typically deep pockets at higher elevations. The snowpack is currently primed and starting to melt. Widespread ablation at lower elevations and south facing terrain was noted. Soil saturation has increased in the last few weeks on an elevational gradient as melting picks up with lower elevations drying out, middle elevations close to saturation, and high elevations just starting to melt.

Director Rosemary Carroll asked Mr. Gochis if he would expect runoff to look like the 2020 year in terms of timing and volume. David Gochis said he will need to go back and look at that year's model but said it would not take much more energy for runoff to really increase quickly.

General Manager Chavez reminded the Board that the US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) coordinates releases from the Aspinall Unit with water that is flowing in from the North Fork to meet the flow targets at the gage at Whitewater, Colorado as part of the Aspinall Unit Record of Decision for re-operations. She also mentioned that the USBR will no longer be providing official bi-monthly forecasts from the Colorado Basin River Forecast Center (CBRFC) but instead will just send out reports once at the first of each month. Director Fonken asked who gets the monthly forecasts from the USBR and if

those reports can be provided to the Board for the next couple of months. Kate Burchenal mentioned ASO has an email distribution group that anyone may be added to. Director Hazard asked if this was public data; Kate Burchenal replied this is all publicly available now and that if anyone would like to access this data, they only need to create a login. Staff can also work on adding board member email addresses to USBR's email distribution list.

5. Treasurer's Report

Treasurer John Perusek reported we are going to have to reinvest proceeds from a \$200,000 bond that is maturing and are considering another certificate of deposit or other investment recommended by the District's investment representative.

6. General Counsel Update

Legislative Activity Report – General Counsel John McClow reported that he included an update on pending legislation in the Board packet. The general assembly ends its session on May 7th. He noted there is very little if any proposed bills that affect the District. Counselor McClow noted that the Upper Division States sent a letter to the Secretary of the Interior in response to a letter from the Lower Division States to the Secretary. The states are still committed to try to come to a consensus on operating guidelines. The deadline for a consensus plan is the end of May. Principals are still meeting every other week. At the last meeting, there were some proposals made that indicate there is hope the states can reach that consensus. Director Andy Spann asked if the proposals can be shared with the Board, but Counselor McClow replied that this would not be possible until a consensus has been reached. President McPhail asked for clarification that this would be by the end of May. Counselor McClow replied “yes” and if the states do not reach agreement by the end of May, the Bureau of Reclamation will proceed with their own analysis based on the scenarios published in January.

Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) 2024 ISF Appropriations - Counselor McClow noted that during the March 2025 meeting the CWCB declared its intent to appropriate a number of instream flow water rights, many of which are in Water Division 4, including Cabin Creek, Canyon Creek and Red Creek. He provided a link to review the full recommendations: <https://cwcb.colorado.gov/2025-isf-recommendations>

7. Basin Water Supply Update

Senior Program/Office Manager Beverly Richards reported that after she developed the water supply report the April 28, 2025 TLUG meeting took place. CBRFC reported that soil moisture is in better shape in the upper basin than it was last year. She said it was wetter than average the first two months of the year but now it has declined and the basin is drying out. The Upper Basin is at 64% of the average precipitation for this time of year. The snow water equivalent (SWE) is now ranging from just 0-30% remaining. According to the CBRFC, the streamflows from runoff are forecasted to range from 71-84% in the basin.

Forecasted inflows to Blue Mesa for the spring runoff are predicted to be 70 percent of average. Currently, the basin is moving into a moderately dry year category with a requirement of a one-day flushing flow from Blue Mesa. The designation will be made following the official May 1 forecast from the CBRFC.

8. General Manager, Staff, Committee and Program Updates Reports

Project and Funding: General Manager Sonja Chavez reported that the District did complete the ASO contract and has finished the contract with the Colorado River District for their portion of the funding for the ASO flights in 2025.

Colorado PL-566 Collaborative Update: General Manager Chavez reported that a group of conservancy and conservation district managers are looking to utilize this collaborative effort to help share experiences utilizing PL-566 Watershed Protection & Flood Prevention funding for ag infrastructure projects and to work together to advocate to NRCS on program changes needed.

A new Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Aubrey Bettencourt, was selected and is a prominent leader in agriculture, water, and sustainability, having worked in both the private sector and at USDA. She also served in the United States Department of Interior during the first Trump Administration. There are several ongoing concerns about the loss of NRCS staff at the local levels.

Senator Bennett met with the Colorado Ag Water Alliance and indicated that he does not have much confidence that a new Farm Bill will be passed under the current federal administration.

The current CO PL-566 Collaborative recommendation was that water leaders should reach out to their federal congressmen and women and especially new staffers to educate them about how the program is being utilized in the state and why it is so important. There were also conversations about asking the state to create a funding pool to help with planning and engineering to help project proponents move through the NEPA process faster.

Watershed Management Planning: Water Resource Project Manager Bailey Friedman reported that the Watershed Management Plan will be ready for the public input by the end of May 2025.

Wet Meadows Program: Wet Meadows Program Director Amanda Aulenbach reported that two new technicians will be joining the District starting on May 12th. These technicians will work from May until the end of August, with the opportunity to extend their contracts through the end of October. The Wet Meadows Program has applied for an EPA grant to fill in funding holes.

UGRWCD Safety Manual: Director Rosemary Carroll asked if the field safety manual would address snow safety and safety traversing streams. General Manager Chavez replied that the manual could at this time does not address that field work specifically but that staff would work on including snow and stream safety sections. She asked if Director Carroll has any guidance on preferred language that she can share. Director Carroll will send to Sonja. President Stacy McPhail that the

current field safety guide for the Wet Meadows Program be approved so that staff could utilize as part of their on-boarding process for technicians coming up mid-May. Director Hazard asked if this is something that can be continually updated if new concerns come up, General Manager Chavez replied “yes.”

Director Rebie Hazard moved and Director Camille Richard seconded approval of the Field Safety Manual as presented. The motion carried.

Staff will continue updating the manual to include snow work and stream measurement field safety, and present an updated version at the next Board meeting.

Drought Contingency Planning (DCP) Update: The DCP is nearing the final stages of completion. The Board will be asked to review the plan and approve the draft before it goes out for a 30-day public comment period. There continues to be good participation at meetings and the team is now focusing on action items in the plan. A website is being developed that will contain and communicate all the DCP information.

State Dredge & Fill Report: General Manager Chavez and Water Resource Project Manager Friedman reported the current timeline of the draft process and concerns regarding individual authorizations, “activity as a whole” definition, exempted activities for irrigation ditch construction and maintenances, and concerns regarding the recapture provision and new language used in this section of the report.

When asked for any input from the Board, President McPhail indicated she has concerns about banking and how the climate is changing. She is concerned with changes in currencies and does not want to see regulations or new authorizations required that could be linked to an outside private currency. She noted that it will be interesting to see what banking opportunities will look like in 10 to 15 years.

Spencer Avenue Business Park: UGRWCD Fellow Alana Nichols reported that she has met with a landscape architect to talk about plans to “wildscape” the grounds for the Spencer Business Park as part of the state’s turf replacement grant program. Ms. Nichols has been working with a landscape business in Denver to coordinate the free turf removal set to happen early to mid-June. The “plant in a box” selection will be delivered close to that time as well. The District only got one bid returned from SCJ Alliance for design and implementation support and will move forward contracting with them.

Education Update: The Gunnison Valley Environmental Education Council held their first meeting on March 30, 2025 at the Almont Resort. It was well attended, and a lot of ideas were compiled. A summary of that meeting is provided in the public board packet.

Grant Program: The Vader Irrigation Improvement Project was originally proposed in 2023. Since then, there have been several delays in getting the project moving forward including concerns over the cost of the Griffing No. 2 as designed by NRCS and the recent blowout of McCanne No. 2. A decision has been made to prioritize McCanne No. 2 utilizing the IntelliDitch liner product in the blowout section only and re-evaluate piping the full 1200-foot segment since the cost of pipe has come down. Staff supports the timeline extension request but would like to discuss the use of the \$2,500 in the proposal for the IntelliDitch liner, which may not be a long-term solution for this ditch if the piping goes forward.

Director Andy Spann said he does not have an issue with helping fund this new type of ditch liner, especially if there is an educational and learning component to this project.

Director Andy Spann moved and Director Camille Richard seconded the approval of a no-cost timeline extension of the Vader Irrigation Improvement Project grant to December 15, 2025. The motion carried.

STOR: As noted in the board packet memorandum, the STOR committee is seeking funding from various constituents in the basin to support four summer USFS recreation technicians. The USFS cannot hire summer technicians to maintain the forests through the summer due to a hiring freeze and the Crested Butte Mountain Bike Association stepped up to be that third-party entity to hire techs which would be overseen by the USFS.

There was a lot of discussion among board members acknowledging the importance of maintaining public lands, but feeling hiring recreational employees was outside the mission of the District. Director Zanetell felt that it could be a valuable position for a graduate student seeking work experience. Historical complications working with CBMA on a previous project were also noted. General Council's input was not to support the funding request. Director Richard asked what the District could do this summer to help support impacts to our forests from tourism given the worsening situation with adequate personnel with the USFS. Consensus on seeing more law enforcement throughout the forests/public lands was recommended. Chair McPhail suggested at the next board retreat that a conversation be had about the District's role as it relates to recreation in the basin.

ACTION: No motion came from the board regarding this agenda item.

Taylor Local User's Group (TLUG): TLUG Chairman Don Sabrowski reported outcomes from the April 10 and 22, 2025 meeting which showed the CBRFC forecast putting us in an average year category but all signs pointed to a downward trend to the "Dry" category. The consensus of the TLUG representatives was to continue to be conservative with operational releases and they accepted the USBR's proposed operational plan until after the TLUG representative could review the May 1st forecast.

The next meeting is scheduled for May 8th at 9 a.m. Director Sabrowski fully believes that the next forecast will move Taylor River inflow into the “dry year” category and he expressed concern for irrigators given the lack of runoff flows we are currently seeing.

Direct Spann expressed that this is a concern he’s heard from many irrigators as well. General Manager Chavez asked if the USBR is not providing “official mid-month forecasts” is there any concern under the subordination agreement? General Counsel responded that it might be a matter of collaboration and using the best resources available (e.g., unofficial forecasts from CBRFC and WRF-Hydro weekly forecasts). Direct Sabrowski asked if the forecast changes from an average runoff to a dry runoff, with the peak runoff occurring prior to the first week of June, might this have a direct impact on the flush? Director Spann asked what the stipulation says about the timing of the flush and could it be moved back to catch more of the peak runoff? General Counsel said the idea is to use time the releases with peak runoff as part of any flushing flow.

Scientific Endeavors: Director Rosemary Carroll reported that she will be reporting on the NEON project at the May Board Meeting in Lake City.

Gunnison River Festival: General Manager Chavez said there is not much to update on at this moment. Planning is still ongoing, activities and vendors are being finalized.

9. Miscellaneous Matters

Board Terms Expiring and Process: In the packet were documents showing the two board vacancies: Director Julie Nania’s term (Division 5) is expiring and there is an opening in the City of Gunnison (Division 8), due to the resignation of Mike Rogers. Applications must be received by Judge Kellie Starritt by May 30, 2025 at 5 p.m.

Colorado Water Congress Summer Convention is in Steamboat Springs August 19-21, 2025. Board members were encouraged to express their interest soon so that staff could book rooms, as the convention center tends to sell out early.

Tour of Homestake Mine and Arch Ditch Automation is scheduled for September 22, 2025. Mr. Yamaguchi will provide more details for the day’s agenda after discussion in late August/early September with the Homestake representatives.

NRCS Source Water Protection –General Manager Chavez reported that the District sent a memo to CDPHE and NRCS to submit multiple HUC12 watersheds in the basin that could be included in a future SWP program in the state.

Director Fonken asked Ari Yamaguchi how often they interact with the public when in the field. Ari mentioned it does not happen very often and that it is dependent usually upon how close to a road they are working. Director Fonken suggested having WAG BAGS to hand out to people to mitigate human and pet waste in the field.

10. Citizen Comments

Director Brooke Zanetell invited everyone on Saturday May 17, 2025, to celebrate the turning on of the ditches in the town ditch system.

Director Joellen Fonken asked if staff could start planning the board retreat. General Manager Chavez reported the retreat will likely be in the fall and it will be part of strategic planning efforts.

11. Future Meetings

A list of upcoming meetings was included in the packet. The Board was reminded that the May Board Meeting will be in Lake City on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at 12:30 p.m. with lunch served at noon.

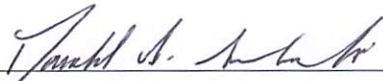
12. Summary of Meeting Action Items

- Field Safety Manual: Staff will develop language on safety practices in active streams and during winter conditions with input from Director Carroll.
- Time will be set aside for Director Carroll to present on NEON at the May Board Meeting in Lake City.

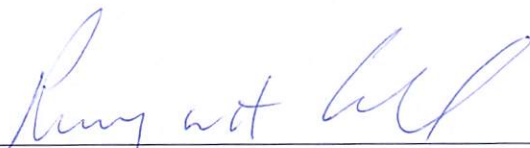
13. Adjournment

Board President Stacy McPhail adjourned the regular Board meeting on April, 28, 2025 at 8:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Don Sabrowski, Secretary



Rosemary Carroll, Vice-President

