



Upper Gunnison Drought Contingency Plan: Task Force Meeting

Minutes

October 25th, 2024

Attendees:

Shannon Hessler (Mount Crested Butte)
Lisa Brown (Wilson Water Group)
Shannon Muenchow (USFS)
Ashley Bembenek (Coal Creek Watershed Coalition)
Jon Hare (High Country Conservation Advocates)
Carolyn De Groot (Town of Crested Butte)
Heather Miller (NRCS)
Brinnen Carter (National Park Service)
Jonathan Houck (Gunnison County)
Jesse Kruthaupt (Trout Unlimited)
Savannah Nelson (Sunshine Creatives)
Casey Smith (Bureau of Reclamation)
Susan Washko (Western Colorado University)
Nathan Darnell (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
Dustin Brown (Scenic River Tours)
Cody Tusing (City of Gunnison)

Staff/Consultants:

Stacy Beagh (Strategic By Nature)
Carrie Padgett (Harris Water Engineering)
Sonja Chavez (UGRWCD)
Alana Nichols (UGRWCD)

I. Introductions and Agenda Overview

Stacy Beaugh reviewed the agenda, highlighting the hybrid setup and the importance of clear communication. She explained that the primary goal of the session was to gather input from Task Force members to further refine the Drought Contingency Planning efforts. Stacy reminded attendees that no formal decisions would be made during this session.

II. Communications Task

Savannah Nelson gave a brief introduction and overview of the purpose of the communications plan for the Upper Gunnison Drought Contingency Plan (DCP). She explained that she would lead efforts to communicate the drought plan to the public and will be working closely with a small subgroup of the Task Force known as the communications team. Savannah reviewed the duties of this communications team, which will be responsible for decisions related to design, branding, and communication channels, with a focus on ensuring culturally sensitive messaging. She invited volunteers to join the committee and noted that meetings will be held monthly. Interested individuals were encouraged to contact Savannah, Stacy, or Alana to participate. Savannah also emphasized the importance of engaging with the agricultural community to gather input on the drought plan and reiterated that the formation of the communications committee would support the overall outreach strategy.

III. Review and Refine Potential Actions

Carrie Padgett provided a summary of the purpose of mitigation and response actions within the plan. She explained that this session would focus on reviewing both short- and long-term strategies for addressing drought conditions. The Task Force would reflect on and refine the comments gathered during previous stakeholder meetings and the workshop. Carolyn asked if the group's responses would be compared to other DCPs to ensure critical elements were not being overlooked. Stacy confirmed that handouts had been provided for this purpose.

Carrie clarified that mitigation actions represent ongoing, proactive efforts aimed at building long-term drought resiliency, while response actions are short-term, reactive measures triggered by defined drought conditions. Participants were encouraged to consider the timeline and duration of actions when identifying potential implementation challenges and collaborative opportunities. There was also discussion of the criteria that would be used to evaluate and prioritize actions for inclusion in the final plan.

IV. Refine Goals and Identify Prioritization Process

Stacy Beaugh invited the Task Force to conduct a more detailed review of the mitigation and response actions, emphasizing the need to align the final selection with implementation capacity and community values. She shared feedback from two groups: one recommended against funding existing projects, while the other emphasized the need to continue investing in and

supporting ongoing programs. This highlighted a philosophical divide among participants, which would need to be addressed as the actions were prioritized. Stacy also walked the Task Force through the prioritization criteria for the Upper Gunnison DCP.

Stacy described the community engagement conducted so far, noting that 55 people had participated in workshops and stakeholder meetings. While input had been gathered from a variety of sectors, she acknowledged that agricultural representation remained limited. The initial list of over 60 proposed actions had been narrowed to approximately 40, with a goal of finalizing 15 to 20 well-developed implementable items for the final plan. She invited participants to reflect on the feasibility and implications of each proposed action.

Sonja asked about how actions would be prioritized, another Task Force member indicated that feedback on criteria would be addressed later in the meeting. Stacy confirmed that the planning team was reviewing the list of actions against other regional plans, including the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association's plan and the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Stacy outlined the "World Café" format that would be used for Task Force discussions. Task Force would rotate between tables to discuss actions related to agriculture, environment, and municipal/industrial water use. Afterward, Task Force would have time to reflect and share questions or additional input.

Carrie added that supporting existing projects might be more efficient than launching entirely new ones.

Shannon Muenchow noted that many federal partners are already operating at full capacity, which may limit the ability to take on additional projects.

Jon Hare stressed the importance of long-term drought and wildfire planning and suggested that funding for additional staffing may be necessary to implement key initiatives.

Stacy provided a timeline update, indicating that a draft of the DCP would be available soon. She also reinforced the importance of including more input from the agricultural community in the coming weeks.

Ashley mentioned that the "project champion" category in the action list could benefit from clarification, specifically regarding which organizations or agencies have the authority and capacity to implement the proposed actions.

V. Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Stacy reviewed the project schedule and stated that the draft of the Drought Contingency Plan would be available in February and March. She noted that during the winter season, a dedicated workshop with the agricultural community would take place to further refine the response actions from that sector. Simultaneously, the communications plan and public-facing tools would be finalized alongside the draft DCP.

Lisa Brown provided an overview of the types of water supply modeling that could be conducted for the Upper Gunnison Basin. She offered examples, such as modeling water use for ski resorts and snowmaking operations. She emphasized the importance of quantifying water diversion needs during low-flow periods and suggested that modeling could help determine appropriate storage capacities.

Stacy Beaugh stressed the importance of consolidating Task Force input to help prioritize actions for the final plan. She noted that the timeline for the upcoming stakeholder meeting may be extended to ensure robust outreach and better inclusion of agricultural perspectives. One Task Force member voiced support for this idea and suggested extending the planning timeline by up to six months to allow sufficient time to finalize the report. Stacy concluded by stating that the Task Force would need to review and prioritize the actions list, which would be circulated to the full group shortly.

VII. Adjournment

The next Task Force meeting will be November 20 at 9:00 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned by Stacy Beaugh at 11:01 a.m.