



Upper Gunnison Drought Contingency Plan: Task Force

Minutes

May 21, 2025

Task Force Attendees:

Dayle Funka (USFS)
Brandon Diamond (CPW)
Ashley Bembenek (CCWC)
Casey Smith (BOR)
Brinnen Carter (NPS)
Shannon Hessler (Mount Crested Butte)
Carolyn De Groot (Town of Crested Butte)
Hannah Cranor-Kersting (CSU Extension)

Consultants/Staff:

Stacy Beaugh (Strategic By Nature)
Carrie Padgett (Harris Wilson Water Group)
Lisa Brown (UGRWCD)
Sonja Chavez (UGRWCD)
Alana Nichols (UGRWCD)
Savannah Nelson (Sunshine Creatives)

I. Introductions, Agenda Overview, and DCP Progress:

Stacy reviewed the agenda and provided an update on the DCP progress. She confirmed that only one Task Force meeting and one stakeholder meeting remain, and the public meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 11. The public comment period has been adjusted to run from July 1 to July 30 to accommodate the board's schedule, with the board's approval pending. Carrie introduced the main objectives of the plan, which focus on recognizing drought, its impacts, and protective measures.

Action Item: Continue gathering feedback and ensure all comments are submitted before the final Task Force meeting.

II. Task Force Comments and Discussion:

Carrie began the discussion by presenting the planning objectives, which include identifying how drought can be recognized in its early stages, understanding how it will affect the basin, and outlining steps for protecting the community in future droughts. The group discussed drought monitoring procedures, including reviewing local water supplies, selecting relevant indicators, classifications, and triggers, and establishing a process for monitoring water availability over both short- and long-term periods. Carrie reviewed the hydrologic classifications and asked if she should use the terms "dry," "drought," "average," and "wet," or if it would be clearer to use terms like "above average" and "below average."

The Task Force debated the classification of drought levels, with a member proposing a simpler system to replace the confusing "Level 0, 1, and 2" terminology. Ashley and Lisa suggested that the definitions should align with the Record of Decision (ROD) categories for consistency. The group also discussed the need for clear communication regarding actions the community should take at each drought level. Sonja emphasized that drought levels aren't something the public typically follows, so making the classification terms clear is critical. Ashley raised a question about whether "Level 0" should indicate that action is needed, and Lisa proposed adding an introductory section to the document to answer these questions for the general public.

Jesse suggested aligning the drought classifications with Blue Mesa's six-category system to keep it simple and consistent.

Brinnen mentioned that the term "average" has many meanings and stressed the importance of clearly defining it in the plan.

Ashley recommended incorporating graphics to help illustrate the classification process, and Lisa suggested that Drought Levels Table 3 might be premature since the levels will depend on data over time. Carrie explained that she was following the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) guidance to separate drought monitoring from vulnerability assessments. Stacy encouraged Ashley to send a visual concept if it would help clarify her ideas.

Carrie then moved on to the SNOTEL annual SWE data and pointed out changes in the summary tables, specifically the combining of wet and flood years for clarity. The group agreed that improving public understanding of drought classifications could benefit from visual aids.

Carolyn asked how to represent the "average" if water supplies remain low, and Carrie clarified that water supplies of 100-120% of average would be considered "average," while anything over 120% would be classified as "wet."

Action Item: Ensure that the draft document clearly defines terms like "average" and "wet" for public clarity.

Next Step: Carrie will work on incorporating clearer definitions in the draft.

Moving on to the vulnerability and economic impacts section, Carrie highlighted the need to address the economic consequences of drought. She mentioned collaborating with Hannah to update census numbers and gather local economic data.

Ashley suggested identifying the top four industries affected by drought, noting that industries not directly dependent on water may still benefit from healthy ecosystems.

Sonja asked Brinnen if they had any direct data for Blue Mesa usage during both dry and good years, and Brinnen agreed to share the visitor services website to track visitation.

Ashley and Lisa provided editorial feedback on the climate change section, suggesting some data be moved to an appendix to keep the main content focused. Concerns were raised about how precipitation data might not be effective in motivating the public to conserve water.

Dayle Funka recommended the TAPP (Tourism and Prosperity Partnership) as a source for finding relevant economic data. Brandon Diamond agreed to look into researching drought impacts on hunting and fishing. Additionally, NRCS mentioned that they provide SNOTEL data, which may be helpful for understanding precipitation patterns.

Action Item: Carrie to collaborate with Hannah on updating census numbers and local economic data.

Next Step: Brinnen will share visitation data from Blue Mesa.

Carrie then presented revisions to the mitigation action section, moving certain actions to higher priority based on Task Force feedback. The drought outreach strategy was streamlined to combine educational actions and clarify the distinction between individual and organizational responsibilities. The Task Force suggested adding definitions for mitigation and response actions to the executive summary to improve understanding.

Lisa Brown raised the issue of the lack of municipal feedback in the planning process and suggested reviewing land use regulations. Carrie agreed and proposed adding a municipal section to the document, while Carolyn emphasized that the document should be accessible to new staff, with visual aids being helpful.

Action Item: Update the drought outreach strategy to clarify mitigation and response actions.

Next Step: Add a municipal section and ensure the document is accessible to new staff.

III. Public Meeting and Comment Preparation:

Stacy clarified the upcoming dates for the district board and stakeholder meetings, noting that the June 11 meeting will be especially important for gathering public interest and feedback. The public comment period will run from July 1 to July 30, with possible adjustments based on board feedback. Carrie proposed using a Google Form to streamline the collection of public comments, and the group discussed engagement strategies for the public meeting, such as QR codes, breakout groups, and a more visually appealing PDF draft. Sonja highlighted challenges in receiving timely guidance from the government due to departmental transitions but emphasized the group's focus on ensuring a clear and accessible document for public review.

Stacy emphasized the importance of continued input, asking if the Task Force felt the document was usable. Ashley suggested that once the feedback was reviewed, it might be beneficial to reorder the document. She asked if the BOR format needed to be strictly followed, to which Casey from BOR confirmed that the format should remain consistent. Carrie mentioned that a Google Form was ready for stakeholders to submit their comments, and Stacy reiterated that the website will be linked to the document to ensure interconnection.

Action Item: Finalize and distribute the Google Form for public comment collection.

Next Step: Develop engagement strategies (QR codes, breakout groups) and ensure the PDF draft is visually appealing for public review.

The meeting concluded with a reminder of the next stakeholder meeting on June 11, 2025, and the importance of continued feedback to finalize the document.

V. Adjournment

The next Stakeholder Meeting will be Wednesday, June 11, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

This meeting was adjourned by Stacy Beagh at 10:45 a.m.