

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District
Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 26, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.**

The Board of Directors of the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District (UGRWCD) conducted a Regular Board Meeting on Monday, January 26, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. at the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District, 210 West Spencer, Suite A, Gunnison, Colorado and via Zoom video/teleconference.

Board members present: Stuart Asay, Rosemary Carroll, Joellen Fonken, Rebie Hazard (via Zoom) John Perusek, Camille Richard (via Zoom), Don Sabrowski, Andy Spann, Brian Stevens, Jeff Writer, and Brooke Zanetell.

Others present:

Amanda Aulenbach, UGRWCD Wet Meadows Program Director
Sonja Chavez, UGRWCD General Manager
Bailey Friedman, UGRWCD Water Resources Project Manager
Julia Iovino, UGRWCD Water Resources Fellow
John McCLOW, UGRWCD General Counsel (via Zoom)
Carly McGowan, City of Gunnison Engineer
Pete Rice, City of Gunnison Public Works Director
Beverly Richards, UGRWCD Office / Senior Program Manager
Sue Uerling, UGRWCD Administrative Asst. / Communications Specialist
Ari Yamaguchi, UGRWCD Water Resources Specialist

1. CALL TO ORDER

President Don Sabrowski called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. AGENDA APPROVAL

Director Stu Asay moved and Director Rosemary Carroll seconded approval of the agenda. The motion carried.

3. APPROVAL OF December 11, 2025 BOARD MEETING MINUTES:

Director Joellen Fonken moved and Director Brian Stevens seconded approval of the December 11, 2025 Board Meeting Minutes. The motion carried.

4. TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer John Perusek reported that a \$500,000 bond had been called. The District incurred no

loss on this call. The proceeds were rolled over into two certificates of deposit at Gunnison Bank and Trust. The Finance Committee will meet on Wednesday, February 4, 2025 at 10 a.m. to review the 2025 fiscal year.

5. BASIN WATER SUPPLY UPDATE

Senior Program Manager Beverly Richards reported that the Upper Gunnison Basin and the entire western United States continue to be under worsening drought conditions. As of January 6, 2026, she said 92 percent of Gunnison County is now under the “moderate drought” category. Colorado’s snowpack remains at an all-time low for the date. With records starting back in 1987, no winter season has had less of a statewide snowpack by late January than this one, which currently is at about 58 percent of normal for this point in the year. Ms. Richards referenced a Water Conditions Monitoring Committee webinar she was just on, which noted that 2025 was the 4th warmest year on record for Colorado (behind only 1934, 2012, and 2017) and the record warmest for much of the West Slope. December 2025 was the warmest December on record for Colorado, as well as the record warmest for most of the West Slope and Eastern Plains.. Unfortunately, she said that no significant snowfall is predicted for the next 14 days, and temperatures are to remain above normal. To date, the Snow Water Equivalent for the Upper Gunnison Basin still remains at about 65 percent, but that is expected to decrease due to the dry conditions.

Director Rosemary Carroll noted that the SNOTEL sites are not on the sunny side of the slopes and therefore, she wonders if the snowpack is currently lower than what the SNOTEL stations are reporting. Director Carroll feels it will be very helpful to see what upcoming ASO flights find regarding snowpack. General Manager Sonja Chavez reported that the Colorado Water Conservation Board has agreed to cover the \$17,000 funding gap with the District and its partners to cover the 2026 ASO flights.

6. GENERAL COUNSEL UPDATE

EIS Alternatives: Counselor John McClow shared a slideshow by Amy Ost diek of the Colorado Water Conservation Board that provides an overview of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement related to the ongoing Colorado River negotiations. The General Observations included alternatives if the states cannot come to a consensus on a plan, outlining a variety of federally-mandated alternatives that range from making no changes to current operations to a Basic Coordination Alternative, an Enhanced Coordination Alternative, a Maximum Operational Flexibility Alternative, and finally, a Supply-Driven Alternative. Counselor McClow noted that there are issues with all of the alternatives, particularly the Supply-Driven Alternative, where they have just stuck in “gap water” to make enough water available for the model to work. This water doesn’t exist, so he considers it “magic water.”

Director Brooke Zanetell said she had read an article reporting that the state of Arizona does not agree to any of the alternatives because they want additional water for large data centers they are trying to attract to their state. Counselor McClow responded that yes, this was one of the arguments coming from the Governor of Arizona. He reported that Governor Katie Hobbs sent a letter to the Secretary of Interior stating a number of reasons why she feels Arizona provides significant benefits to the nation, including national security from data centers, as well as fruit and vegetable crops. She has been quite outspoken and is digging in her heels saying that Arizona should not have to give up any water. Counselor McClow noted that Arizona will be one of the hardest hit states by the alternatives if no consensus is reached.

Director Jeff Writer said that based on Counselor McClow's analysis of all of the alternatives, none of them sound feasible. Counselor McClow agreed saying that the federal government purposely put these alternatives together in hopes they would scare the states enough to come up with a consensus plan. Mr. McClow confirmed with Director Zanetell that the next deadline is February 14th. The governors of the seven states will have a meeting with the Secretary of Interior in Washington at the end of the week, so he's hoping something positive will come out of that. Director Rosemary Carroll asked what would happen if no consensus is reached by February 14th. Counselor McClow replied that the Bureau of Reclamation has said that they will take over operations at that point. Mr. McClow said that General Manager Chavez will be working on a letter to provide the District's opinion on the alternatives by the deadline of March 2. He said that if a consensus cannot be reached by the deadline, he suspects that one or more of the states will pursue litigation against the Secretary of Interior. He did note that the Secretary has no authority to curtail the delivery of water in the Upper Basin states.

Director Writer asked what effects these negotiations might have on the ag community in the basin and whether they will be able to utilize their senior water rights. Director Chavez said that the State Engineer will be seeking public input on operations if there is no agreement, but that it is possible that the junior water rights holders may be curtailed if the supply is low. Counselor McClow said that the state engineer only has the authority to curtail deliveries if Upper Basin States are out of compliance with the compact.

Legislative Committee: It was reported that so far, only the Outdoor Recreation Act legislative bill pertains to the District. It has been sent back to the Department of Natural Resources for revisions, so the matter has been tabled until the revisions are received and can be reviewed.

There was also discussion about the legislature considering funding of data centers, which require a huge amount of water for coolant. General Manager Chavez said that this was a topic of discussion at the recent Colorado River Water Conservation District (CRWCD) Board meeting and that water managers are concerned about the impacts such data centers could have.

Director Carroll reported that the state of Nevada is also dealing with this matter. General Manager Chavez said that the CRWCD Board got a report that Senators Bennet and Hickenlooper are pursuing the reinstatement of NCAR and streamlining the federal process for funding water projects.

7. GENERAL MANAGER UPDATE

Strategic Planning Update: General Manager Chavez reported that staff from Civic Consulting Collaborative (CCC) met virtually with the District's executive staff and Directors Sabrowski and Carroll on January 7th to begin the strategic planning process. The Strategic Planning Board retreat has been changed from June 29th to **June 10th from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.** at the Gunnison Public Library at CCC's request. The core planning group will meet again on February 4, 2026 at 3 p.m. to continue the process.

Wetland Dredge and Fill Regulations: General Manager Chavez referred to her memorandum in the packet that outlined Colorado Water Congress's (CWC) comments on WOTUS definitions and their position on the matter. She noted that the District is in agreement with CWC's position.

Blue Mesa Harmful Algal Bloom Study: General Manager Chavez shared the link to the USGS's publication of the report and noted that the data disseminated in the report would be helpful when providing public comment about the EIS alternatives from a community health and welfare standpoint.

Aspinall Subordination Report (2024) – General Manager Chavez referred to the report included in the packet as created by Wilson Water Group. The report documents the beneficial uses of the Subordination Agreement by quantifying and summarizing the diversions and depletions associated with current Aspinall Unit water rights. Ms. Chavez noted that the annual reports for the Aspinall unit are a year behind due to the time it takes for the collection and analysis of the data for the previous year.

8. STAFF AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

Taylor Local User's Group (TLUG): TLUG Chair Don Sabrowski reported that current TLUG representatives, Mark Schumacher and Ryan Birdsey, had both sent letters of interest to continue their service on TLUG. These letters were included in the meeting packet. Chairman Sabrowski asked fellow TLUG representative Andy Spann for his input on the qualifications of these representatives. Director Spann replied that he felt both were good candidates to continue in their roles as they both have long-term experience on the TLUG and a high interest in the Taylor River, and they understand the issues involved in the process. He said both men have his full support.

Director Stu Asay moved and Director Joellen Fonken seconded approval of the reappointment of Mark Schumacher as the TLUG representative for the rafting/boating interests. The motion carried.

Director Rosemary Carroll moved and Director John Perusek seconded approval of the reappointment of Ryan Birdsey as the TLUG representative for flatwater interests. The motion carried.

Education and Outreach Committee: UGRWCD Fellow Julie Iovino referred to the memo included in the meeting packet and reported that just today, the committee approved a new Mini-Grant application from Colt Maule for \$500 to provide an immersive Wild Seeds Academy this summer for students ages 8-12 in July 2026.

Basin Water Quality & Quantity Update: Water Resources Specialist Ari Yamaguchi referred to his memorandum included in the meeting packet. He updated the Board on Homestake Mine's decision to delay the submittal of a variance request to the CDHPE based on public comments received, including the letter provided last fall by the District. Mr. Yamaguchi reported that uranium levels in Indian Creek still exceed state standards so Homestake Mines will be delaying their request until then have more thoroughly reviewed the public comments and possible solutions.

Water Resources Report: Water Resources Project Manager Bailey Friedman referred to her memorandum included in the packet and noted that the Watershed Management Plan document has been significantly reduced in length and is under a final review by executive staff. She said that the WMP committee will meet in March to finalize the process.

Ms. Friedman reported that the District was awarded \$260,000 from the Colorado River Water Conservation District (CRWCD) for the Ag Return Flow Study. In addition, it looks promising that the District will be awarded \$370,000 for its NFWF Restore Grant application with the final decision to be announced by March 3rd. A number of agricultural diversion improvement projects were submitted to the Gunnison Basin Roundtable and were approved for full funding. The next step is that these will be submitted to the CRWCD for final consideration. Director Carroll asked how these funding items will be reflected in the budget. General Manager Chavez replied that now the District will not have to pull funding from the reserves for these projects.

Wet Meadows Program Report: Wet Meadows Program Director Amanda Aulenbach referred to her memorandum in the packet and the year-end Wet Meadows report for 2025. She noted that the Wet Meadows partners will be meeting at the District on Tuesday, January 27, 2026 for their first planning meeting for the 2026 season.

Grant Committee Report: Senior Program Manager Beverly Richards updated the Board on some outstanding grants from 2023, 2024 and 2025 that have now been completed, altered or terminated. She noted that \$196,420 was rolled forward from the 2025 Grant cycle into the 2026 budget. She has met with a number of entities who plan to apply for funding in 2026. The deadline for applications is at 5 p.m. on Monday, February 16, 2026.

Ms. Richards and General Manager Chavez reported that District executive staff met to try to formalize the funding process for organizations that have been receiving District funding each year for their operations, outside the District's Grant program, therefore not requiring the 50 percent match as specified in the District Grant program. Executive Management is recommending to the Board that a policy be adopted that clearly specifies guidelines for receiving the funding. The policy was presented in the meeting packet for the Board's consideration. There was some discussion about the maximum level of funding that would be available annually. It was explained that the policy specifies \$10,000 annually with no match requirements and a maximum indirect cost recovery of 10% subject to the Grant Committee's approval for activities that fill critical gaps in accomplishing the District's mission. Ms. Chavez explained that the total figure allocated for such funding would depend on the financial health of the District and will be determined each year during the budget process. This policy will become effective in January 2027.

Director Brooke Zanetell moved and Director John Perusek seconded the amended motion to adopt the Organizational Funding Policy to include the annual funding gap priorities as directed by the Grant Committee. The amended motion carried with Director Camille Richard and Director Jeff Writer abstaining.

Director Andy Spann moved and Director Brian Stevens seconded the motion to approve the Funding Agreement for the Organizational Funding policy. The motion carried.

Gunnison Basin Roundtable (GBRT): General Manager Chavez reported the GBRT approved the four agriculture improvement projects submitted by the District. She noted that there are a few water bills that are in the public stakeholder outreach process that are expected to reach the legislature by mid-February. Counselor McClow reported that the EIS slideshow that was presented to the Board earlier in the evening during his report was also shared with the GBRT.

Scientific Endeavors: Director Rosemary Carroll reported that Ken Williams had given a presentation at the Mayors and Managers meeting early in the month on "A Decade of Discovery in the Upper Gunnison: Recent Findings and Future Directions for Forest Management and Water Resources." She noted that her research team had received funding to study perennial and non-perennial systems in the East River to determine how old the water is in the river by

analyzing mean age tracers. After some discussion, she noted that the reason it matters is that with the models created from the study, it will provide insight about how the bank account of water in the river might be being drained during low snow years and how this will affect the water supply over time. Is an important headwaters stream shrinking? This is what she wants to know.

General Manager Chavez said that she and Director Carroll have been invited to a meeting of scientists and water managers at the CRWCD offices in Glenwood Springs in March 2026 to talk more about the changing hydrology.

9. MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

President Don Sabrowski thanked the District staff for the reports presented at the meeting and he encouraged fellow directors to take time to read the reports included in the packets.

Director Rosemary Carroll said that she heard that Denver Water was suing over the Shoshone water rights decision. Counselor John McClow responded that the matter is now being reviewed in the state water court and that anyone can submit a statement of opposition prior to the January 31st deadline for such actions. At this time, Denver has not submitted a statement of opposition, but he believes they will before the deadline. He said this does not mean that Denver Water is suing but is participating in the water court process to change the water right.

Director Brooke Zanetell reported that she serves on the Gunnison County Environmental health board and that they are currently having meetings to discuss the county's offsite water treatment system regulations.

10. CITIZEN COMMENTS

There were no citizens in attendance at this time to make comments.

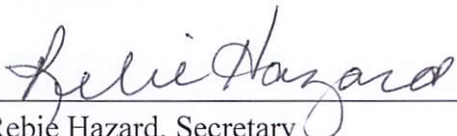
11. FUTURE MEETINGS

General Manager Chavez reminded everyone that the Colorado Water Congress Annual Conference will begin on Wednesday, January 28, 2026.

12. ADJOURNMENT

Board President Don Sabrowski adjourned the January 26, 2026 Board Meeting at 7:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Rebie Hazard, Secretary



Don Sabrowski, President

