

**Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District  
Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes  
Monday, April 27, 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, April 27, 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, Joellen Fonken, Rebie Hazard, John Perusek (via Zoom), Camille Richard, Don Sabrowski, Brian Stevens, and Brooke Zanetell.

Board members absent: Rosemary Carroll, Andy Spann and Jeff Writer

Others present:

Amanda Aulenbach, UGRWCD Wet Meadows Program Director

Sonja Chavez, UGRWCD General Manager

Jules Iovino, UGRWCD Water Resources Fellow

Leon Katona, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Jesse Kruthaupt, Trout Unlimited

John McCloy, UGRWCD General Counsel (via Zoom)

Beverly Richards, UGRWCD Office / Senior Program Manager

Rob Richards, USGS (via Zoom)

Tom Rozman, Colorado Division of Water Resources

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 5:33 p.m.

**2. AGENDA APPROVAL**

General Manager Sonja Chavez provided an amended agenda for the meeting

**Director Stu Asay moved and Director Rebie Hazard seconded approval of the amended agenda. The motion carried.**

**3. APPROVAL OF MARCH 23, 2026 BOARD MEETING MINUTES:**

**Director Brooke Zanetell moved and Director Stu Asay seconded approval of the March 23, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes. The motion carried.**

#### **4. TREASURER'S REPORT**

Treasurer John Perusek referred to his memorandum in the packet. He reported that the District had a bond that matured and those funds were reinvested in another bond earning four percent. The District also purchased a new \$300,000 five-year Treasury Note in accordance with the reserve policy which directs management to invest any unused funds from the prior year's budget.

#### **5. GENERAL COUNSEL UPDATE**

**Legislative Update:** Counselor John McClow reported that there are approximately two more weeks in this legislative session. He said bills being followed by the District, , are stalled in appropriations. The data center incentive bill will be in committee Thursday. There is substantial opposition, so it might not make it out of committee. Since the legislature must address a \$1.5 billion budget deficit for this fiscal year,2026-27 fiscal year, funding decisions will be very competitive. There are still rumors that a right-to-float bill will be introduced, but in an email exchange last week Hattie Johnson, spokesperson for the proponents, said there is not a bill planned.

#### **Contract with Mt. Crested Butte Water & Sanitation District (MCBWS) for shared storage at Meridian Lake Reservoir:**

Counselor McClow explained that the District was approached by MCBWS about entering into a contract to share storage in Meridian Lake Reservoir to support their future water needs. The purpose of the pump station and pipeline is to divert spring runoff from Washington Gulch and store it in Meridian Lake Reservoir to help offset summer and fall demand shortfalls. MCBWS states that when inflows do not refill Meridian's 431 acre-feet of firm storage, the pump station and pipeline can be used to shore up the reservoir during shortfalls. Mr. McClow said there is plenty of water to meet all users' needs at this time under this scenario. Since releases would be only be 4.5 cfs at the pump station, he does not believe this would result in a rapid drawdown and should not affect the shoreline.

Craig Ullman, a public engineer with Applegate Group, was contracted by the District to review MCBWS's design plans, engineering documents and firm yield analysis. He noted that AECOM, MCBWS's design engineers, have completed 30 percent of the design and that a geotechnical investigation and survey had been completed. He has reviewed these materials and confirmed that their analysis and survey were adequate and that he did not have any major concerns about this project affecting the dam's stability or shoreline. He noted that they did include data from dry water years 2000 and 2012 in their firm yield analysis. He said the project

is basically proposing to use the storage that is already there and draw it down on a more regular basis. Mr. Ullman was concerned that by avoiding high flow periods when water is most likely available for diversion, particularly in dry years, it may be possible that flows through the stilling basin/wet well could be limited to 50 cfs and additional water would be passed over the spillway of Meridian Lake Park Reservoir. The impacts of this should be evaluated further, he said. He noted that while there is currently a staff gauge on the shore to measure elevation, that it would be beneficial when the project is under construction, to use a flow meter and not place it close to the intake or valves as this can interfere with the meter and cause inaccurate readings.

Counselor McClow said the Application for the junior water rights will be filed with the Water Court. The consensus of the Board was that they have no issues with General Counsel entering into a legal agreement with MCBWSD to keep the process moving. Counsel noted that it is under the jurisdiction of the Upper Gunnison River Water Activity Enterprise (WAE) to authorize a joint application to the Water Court for an amended junior storage right at Meridian Lake Reservoir. Therefore, a special meeting of the WAE will be called during May.

## **6. BASIN WATER SUPPLY UPDATE**

Senior Program Manager Beverly Richards reported that March 2026 was the warmest month on record ever and the second driest month ever. She said that over 90 percent of the state is now experiencing some level of drought. Although forecasters are saying that La Niña is now over and that an El Niño weather pattern will likely start in June or July and could reach “super El Niño” status which is the weather conditions produced as a result of warmer ocean temperatures (about 2 degrees Celsius above normal), the fronts could go both north and south of this area and miss the Gunnison basin altogether. The best news she could report is that drought conditions in the area have not degraded any further than when she made her report at the March meeting due to the recent precipitation.

General Manager Sonja Chavez noted that due to projected low reservoir storage , harmful algal blooms will be a concern for the summer.

## **7. GENERAL MANAGER’S UPDATE**

**Strategic Planning:** General Manager Chavez reported that staff met with Civic Consulting Collaborative (CCC) via Zoom on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Jacob Bornstein (CCC) outlined the plan for staff and will define what the District’s strategy will be to "bend the curve" toward a desired future, beyond its essential core work. The plan will focus on two to three external pillars and one internal pillar in the final plan. CCC will continue to work on a report based on the April 15<sup>th</sup> meeting and will present it to the Board at the retreat on June 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Taylor Local User's Group (TLUG):** Chairman Don Sabrowski reported that a special meeting was called on April 23, 2026, at the request of TLUG Agricultural Representative, Andy Spann, on behalf of local agricultural water users on the Gunnison River. With the current low flows in the Gunnison River and low releases of 60 cfs from Taylor Reservoir Dam, irrigators are unable to divert water into their structures. They do not want to have to conduct significant channel manipulation and dry-up the Gunnison mainstem in order to make a call on the Gunnison. As hydrologic conditions continue to decline, TLUG representatives recommended increasing releases from Taylor from 60 to 150 cfs to supplement flows in the Gunnison River and hopefully prevent senior water right holders from making a call, which has negative downstream effects. The rafting representatives acknowledged that they will likely only have a season in June and July. Under the current draft operations plan, Taylor Reservoir will not meet the end-of-year storage content of 60,000 acre-feet as outlined in the amended stipulation and Four Parties approval will be required. It was also noted that there may be water temperature exceedance impacts on the fishery due to low water conditions and high air temperatures which may necessitate fishing closures by Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The next TLUG meeting is May 6, 2026, at 1 p.m.

**Drought Outreach Campaign/Activities Update:** UGRWCD Fellow Jules Iovino presented an update on the drought outreach campaign, noting that there are new radio ads running on KEJJ and KVLE and that she is working on yard signs, social media posts, monthly news updates, publicizing the drought dashboard and conservation magnets for area hotels. Approximately 150 people attended the Community Drought Meeting either in person or on Zoom on April 14, 2026 at Western Colorado University.

Director Rebie Hazard asked about banners with drought messaging that could be displayed on highways in rural areas. Director Brian Stevens also wondered about coordinating with CDOT or the City of Gunnison about including drought messaging on the electronic billboards in the city and on highways. Staff will investigate both of these possibilities.

General Manager Chavez was asked about the Gunnison River Festival (GRF), whether or not it would go on due to declining water levels. She said the festival has been moved forward one week to June 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> which will hopefully still have adequate water levels. The GRF Board is already making plans for different activities "low water" activities for the Whitewater Park Festival.

Director Brooke Zanetell reported that the Blessing of the Ditches Celebration has been moved from Meadows Park to American Legion Park on Saturday, May 16, 2026, at 11 a.m. She noted that everyone in Gunnison has a shared responsibility for caring for the ditches and that Western students conducted a volunteer neighborhood ditch cleaning effort that was well received. Director Don Sabrowski offered that if the students conduct another volunteer ditch cleaning day to let him

know as 4-H groups in the county might also want to help.

**Water Quality and Control Update:** Water Resource Specialist Ari Yamaguchi included a memo in the Board packet with an update that the Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCOG) through its Water Quality/Quantity Committee (QQ) (of which UGRWCD is a member) and High Country Conservation Advocates (HCCA) have submitted a Joint Responsive Prehearing Statement (RPHS) to the WQCD expressing support by these organizations for the early deletion of the Cadmium Temporary Modification for Coal Creek, citing the efficacy of extensive reclamation work completed by Mt. Emmons Mining Company (MEMC) at the Keystone Mine site.

**Lake Fork Valley Conservancy Request for WSRF Letter of Support:** On behalf of the Lake Fork Valley Conservancy, executive director Camille Richard presented a PowerPoint presentation outlining sedimentation issues affecting Lake San Cristobal's storage capacity. She explained that channelization of Slumgullion Creek has increased sediment deposition in the lake's three-foot critical zone, potentially reducing available augmentation storage. Richard is proposing a bathymetric survey to better understand the rate of sedimentation since the 2013 baseline survey was conducted. The new survey would cost \$78,000 and would be funded primarily by grant applications to the Gunnison Basin Roundtable and Colorado River District. Ms. Richard is seeking a letter of support from the District's Board of Directors to accompany these grant applications. Discussion ensued about mitigation options, which may include dredging the creek and upland mitigation, both of which face significant environmental permitting, hazardous waste removal, cost and implementation challenges. Counselor John McClow advised that a new bathymetric survey for the purpose of determining rate of sedimentation or loss of storage capacity would not provide useful information for the District or help inform BMPs to address the Slumgullion Slide stating that when the plan for augmentation was prepared, the District knew sedimentation from the slide was occurring and would continue to occur and that the augmentation plan was designed to accommodate the potential loss of storage capacity far into the future. General Manager Chavez noted that a geo-fluvial engineer was hired by UGRWCD to explore options for addressing the Slumgullion Slide and that her input was that there was no way to stop the slide and that BMPs should focus on public education, an early warning system, and potential work in the two drainage basins to the north and south to protect the highway and community. She agreed with Counselor McClow and noted that expenses getting through the NEPA process alone would likely be in the millions of dollars.

**Director Brooke Zanetell moved to approve a letter of support from the Board of Directors for the Lake Fork Valley Conservancy. The motion failed due to lack of a second.**

**Scientific Endeavors:** Director Rosemary Carroll was not present to give a report.

**Approval of Amended Field Safety Guide:** General Manager Chavez reported that staff is requesting minor editorial updates to the Field Safety Guide. She has reviewed and approved the document and is requesting that the board approved the amended version. Director Joellen Fonken said she appreciates staff efforts to update the guide as necessary.

**Director Brian Stevens moved and Director Rebie Hazard seconded the approval of the amended UGRWCD Field Safety Guide. The motion carried.**

## **8. MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS**

General Manager Chavez congratulated General Counsel John McClow on his selection as the Diane Hoppe Leadership Award recipient by Water Education Colorado (WECO). He will be presented the award at the WECO President's Reception on Thursday, September 10, 2026 at the Denver Botanical Gardens. Ms. Chavez said Board members and spouses are invited to attend and if there is enough interest, the District may purchase a table(s) to join John in celebrating this achievement. An email invitation will be sent to all Board members who should RSVP their interest.

## **9. CITIZEN COMMENTS**

Leon Katona with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment reported that the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC) has scheduled a rulemaking hearing for June 8-9, 2026 in Crested Butte, regarding regulations #32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, and 38. He said that public comment is important to the WQCC and that written comments can be submitted by May 27, 2026 or by giving public testimony by attending the hearing.

## **10. FUTURE MEETINGS**

Board members were reminded that May 2026 Board meeting will be on a Tuesday, May 19, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. instead of the usual Monday meeting.

## **11. SUMMARY OF MEETING ACTION ITEMS**

Staff will send an email to Board members inviting them to the WECO President's Reception on September 11, 2026 at the Denver Botanical Gardens and staff will look into drought campaign highway banners. Board members shall RSVP their interest.

## **12. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Board President Don Sabrowski adjourned the public portion of the meeting. General Counsel McClow stated the Board is authorized to meet in executive session to discuss personnel matters

by § 24-6-402(4)(f)(I), Colorado Revised Statutes.

**Director Asay moved and Director Richard seconded for the Board to go into Executive Session. The motion carried.**

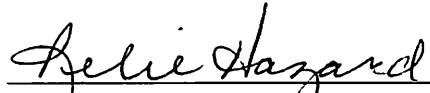
**13. REPORT OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION**

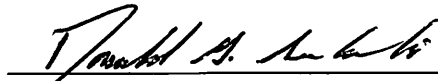
**Director Asay moved and Director Stevens seconded to reclassify the Administrative Assistant position to a full time, fully benefitted position. The motion carried.**

**14. ADJOURNMENT**

Board President Don Sabrowski adjourned the April Board meeting at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Rebie Hazard, Secretary

  
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Don Sabrowski, President

