



# RIO GRANDE BASIN ROUNDTABLE NEWSLETTER

## VOL 2. ISSUE 2

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### NEXT MEETING:

No November Meeting  
December 11, 2018

#### OTHER:

**NOV. 9, 2018: 6-9 PM**

Rio Reels Fundraiser  
Benefiting the Rio Grande  
Headwaters Restoration  
Project

ASU McDaniel 101, Alamosa

## WELCOME!

For more information on the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable, visit [rgbrt.org](http://rgbrt.org)

### SUMMER TOUR SERIES CONCLUDES

Written by Bethany Howell

Now that the brilliant colors of the aspens have mostly blown away and we are on the other side of the season's first snow-storm, it's officially fall. The end of summer meant two amazing PEPO (Public Engagement, Participation, & Outreach) tours organized by PEPO liaison Judy Lopez. For those of us who weren't able to attend the tours, we will share first person accounts in this and other newsletters. But don't worry, other tours are in the planning process so if you were sad to miss this summer's events, you'll have other opportunities to connect with our upcoming events (see sidebar). And as always, the community is welcome to attend our regularly scheduled Roundtable meetings on the second Tuesday of most months at 2 pm at the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District Office.

### WATER SUPPLY RESERVE BASIN FUNDED PROJECTS APPROVED

#### RIO GRANDE WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - SUBDISTRICT 1 PRESSURE TRANSDUCER PROJECT

Amount: \$71,348

Description: Installation of 25 well telemetry systems within subdistrict 1 of the RGWCD at historical observation well locations. Units will collect water levels twice a day to improve the historic collection of monthly water levels as part of an ongoing study "Change in Unconfined Aquifer Storage."

#### MOSCA-HOOPER CONSERVATION DISTRICT - RECHARGE MAPPING PROJECT

Amount: \$43,100

Description: Pilot hydrogeology study to further inform groundwater modeling in the San Luis Valley. Study will map site-specific differences in impediments to recharge with the purpose of allowing water managers to reroute surface water to locations with optimal recharge efficiency and potential.



**WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WATER PROJECTS, ISSUES, OR JUST WRAP YOUR HEAD AROUND WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE SAN LUIS VALLEY? LET US KNOW! NO QUESTION IS TOO SILLY - WATER'S IMPORTANT AND WE WANT TO EDUCATE OURSELVES & OTHERS ABOUT THE RIO GRANDE BASIN. CONTACT BETHANY HOWELL @ [RGWCEI@GMAIL.COM](mailto:RGWCEI@GMAIL.COM) TO SUBMIT AN IDEA OR QUESTION.**

# ROUNDTABLE BASIN TOUR 2.0

By Hannah Thill

*Editor's Note: Since many Roundtable members were unable to attend the June Rio Grande Basin Tour sponsored by Water Education Colorado, the Basin offered a similar tour in August in lieu of that month's Roundtable meeting. The following is a first person account from a new community member.*

The Roundtable tour of the Conejos River up to Platoro Reservoir was my first glimpse of the San Luis Valley Basin beyond Cole Park in Alamosa. A week before the tour I packed my bags in southern Indiana and flew to Alamosa for a year of service with the Rio Grande Watershed Conservation and Education Initiative. Within a few hours of sitting in airports and two airplanes, I stepped out to meet the wide open sky cradled by mountains on the horizon, a drastically different place than where I awoke. As time goes by, I am becoming more oriented to my surroundings and slowly learning town names, organizational acronyms, and lots of water terminology.

My first task on the job was to read about the Rio Grande basin history. I absorbed as much as I could about the crucial relationship between San Luis Valley, its neighboring communities, and their most cherished resource—water. However, I had little spatial understanding of the valley and struggled to differentiate between places. Going on the roundtable tour brought the stories alive, anchoring them to real locations. And behind those locations, I saw a hardworking community committed and passionate about preserving available water, ensuring equitable distribution, and addressing current and future challenges.

The day began at the Manassa Opera House with an introduction to the Conejos River and to water administration between compact deliveries and consumptive use. The complex water forecasts and hydrogeology were intriguing and I saw the significance of projects like the improved radar system and well level monitoring spearheaded by the Conejos River System Users. Data is a powerful tool, especially when applied to the management of limited resources. It was encouraging to see collaboration in developing new research technology and local studies. Our outdoor ventures began at the Manassa Ditch Diversion. The dam designates water to flow either into the ditch for local use, or to continue along the Conejos to fulfill downstream needs or serve as compact payment to New Mexico.



Tour participants visited Platoro Reservoir at the south end of the San Luis Valley.

Photo Credit: Hannah Thill

While the water was flowing into the ditch, the Conejos section had barely a trickle along the exposed rock bed. The severity of this year's low snowpack is obvious even to me as an outsider. Our tour then led us over miles of gravel roads winding higher and higher along the Conejos headwaters. Trees and rocks sprang up around us. We saw wildlife among the riverside vegetation, cattle roaming the open spaces, and sobering swathes of dead trees, victims of the mountain pine beetle. Emma Reesor with the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project and Kevin Terry with Trout Unlimited and the Conejos Winter Flow Program shared how the life we observed was an integral part of the river system and how their goals not only preserve water, but support wildlife and river ecosystems. The tour ended at Platoro Reservoir after climbing to 10,000 ft in elevation. The importance and beauty made it a fitting final destination. I was able to enjoy the picturesque views and learn its historical significance for water storage within the San Luis Valley.

I left the tour excited to call the San Luis Valley home for the next year. I am extremely impressed by the beauty of the area and the commitment of individuals to both the land and the people. Studying biology and ecology in college has taught me valuable lessons that extend beyond science. The most resilient communities are those with the most diverse number of species, they can persist with limited resources and recover together from a sporadic and unforgiving world. I see this phenomenon in the Roundtable where a strong, resilient community is built not by a dominating authority but by many voices creating collective solutions.

*Hannah is a full time Mennonite Volunteer staff member with the Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education Initiative.*

*Originally from Indiana, she graduated from Goshen College.*

# A (BRIEF) TALE OF TWO RIVERS

Written by Bethany Howell

When it comes to water, not much is new under the sun, particularly in Colorado. It is speculated that ancient peoples moved locations due to drought conditions or changes in surface water, and while our population today may not have quite the same mobility to pull up stakes and re-settle elsewhere, we can learn from each other's experiences dealing with present day water issues. That was the premise of the recent event hosted by Adams State University's Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center and Department of Biology & Earth Sciences. The South Platte River Basin and the Rio Grande River Basin face a host of issues that are causing both basins to work through the

the realities of water conservation, augmentation, well use, and the relationship between surface and groundwater. Reagan Waskom, director of CSU's Colorado Water Institute, shared insights gained from the South Platte's dire water situation. A series of droughts, culminating in 2002's statewide high impact drought, coupled with years of well user abuse of temporary substitute water supply plans brought the crisis to a head in 2012. Groundwater depletions influenced surface water rights to such an extent that a majority of wells were shut off. The resulting devastation, both to agriculture and to the emotional wellbeing of the community, spurred the South Platte Basin to explore (with legislative direction) options to balance the system. The Rio Grande Basin hopes to avoid such turmoil with the institution of groundwater management subdistricts and water augmentation plans, although this basin also struggles with injurious depletions to the unconfined and confined aquifers and surface water rights through overpumping. A dry climate, poor snowpack, and the resulting low flows during 2018 have given the Rio Grande Basin more to consider as recharging the aquifers becomes a monumental task. Additionally, the Rio Grande Basin has the unique charge of creating and maintaining sustainable aquifers. Simpson and Waskom remain optimistic that both Basins are willing and able to meet the current and future water challenges with the help of their communities.

*Editor's Note: This is a very brief recap of the talk given in September. For a more complete write up, please visit the following links at the Valley Courier website:*

*Part One - <https://alamosanews.com/article/tale-of-two-rivers-story-not-over-yet>*

*Part Two - <https://alamosanews.com/article/tale-of-two-rivers-happy-ending>*

*In addition, a video of the talk will shortly be available through the Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center. For more information about this particular event or for upcoming events through the Center, please contact director Rio de la Vista at [riodelavista@adams.edu](mailto:riodelavista@adams.edu).*



Cleave Simpson, general manager of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District (l), and Reagan Waskom, CSU Colorado Water Institute Director (r), discuss their respective basins' water issues with the community at a special event hosted by ASU's Salazar Rio Grande del Norte Center and Department of Earth Sciences and Biology.

Photo Credit: Valley Courier

## ROUNDTABLE MEMBER HIGHLIGHT



We are proud of our Rio Grande Basin Roundtable members. They are community leaders with an investment in water use, conservation, and beneficial projects. We'll feature a member in each newsletter in an effort to help our community get to know us a little better! You can also find a complete list of members at our website, [www.rgbrf.org](http://www.rgbrf.org).

### **NATHAN COOMBS - CHAIRMAN**

Nathan has been a roundtable member since 2010, residing in Manassa, Colorado. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business from Adams State University and is the manager of the Conejos Water Conservancy District. He is active with a variety of civic and church organizations and enjoys four wheeling, snowmobiling, and motorcycling with his family.