



WELCOME!

For more information on the Rio Grande Roundtable, visit rgbrt.org

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UPCOMING EVENTS

NEXT MEETING:

March 14, 2017
3 pm

SLVWCD Office
623 Fourth St
Alamosa, CO 81101

OTHER:

April 5th, 2017
The Rio Grande Compact Meeting

Santa Fe, NM

BOARD MEMBER RECOGNITION - TRAVIS SMITH

Written by Helen Smith



Travis accepting the Wayne N. Aspinall Award amongst family and friends. Photo: H. Smith

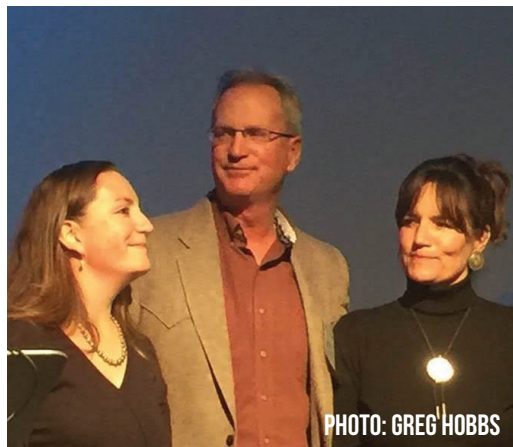
Leadership matters. This is especially true when it comes to Colorado and water. It is because of this reality that the Colorado Water Congress (CWC) established the Wayne N. Aspinall Water Leader of the Year Award. The CWC presents the prestigious Wayne N. Aspinall Award annually to a Coloradan who has long demonstrated courage, dedication, knowledge and leadership in the development, protection and preservation of Colorado water - those attributes possessed by Mr. Aspinall. The late Wayne Aspinall, a

lawyer and former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, remains one of the most influential water leaders in Colorado history. The Aspinall Award is given annually in recognition of a career of service and contribution to Colorado's water community. There have been three amazing leaders who have received the Aspinall Award from the San Luis Valley, Ralph Curtis (2004), Senator Lewis Entz (2007), and most recently, the 2017 recipient, Travis Smith.

Smith began his career in 1978 - 1991 employed by the Colorado Division of Water Resources as Water Commissioner in District 20, administering the Rio Grande main stem. He has served as Superintendent of the San Luis Valley Irrigation District since 1992, overseeing the operation and management of the Rio Grande Reservoir, the Rio Grande Cooperative Project, and Farmers Union Canal. The District provides water for approximately 62,000 acres of highly productive farm ground in the San Luis Valley.

The Rio Grande Reservoir (RGR), built in 1912, has its own rich history that fascinated Smith. As time went on, it became apparent that age brings the necessity for repairs. The dams' left abutment was in need of seepage repair and the aged head gates are challenged to make the necessary releases. The RGR repairs became a mission for Smith.

THE RIO GRANDE



In 2005, Travis was appointed to the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) by Governor Bill Owens. This was the beginning of a long and successful tenure with the Board with re-appointments from three governors and service as CWCB Chair in 2007 and 2008. Smith was involved

in the creation of the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable as well as the development of the Rio Grande Basin Plan and the Colorado Water Plan. Because of his involvement in CWCB, the conversation of funding for the needed RGR repairs was started. As a public-private partnership, the Rio Grande Cooperative Project was/is a funding package designated through CWCB, thanks to the leadership and guidance of the group known as the magnificent seven... Tom Spezze, Tim Feehan, Mike King, Don Deere, Kelly DiNatale, Tod Smith, and Travis. This collaborative partnership provided funding to the San Luis Valley Irrigation District for the needed repairs for Phase 1 at Rio Grande Reservoir and Colorado Parks and Wildlife for repairs at Beaver Reservoir.

After a celebration commemorating the 100th Anniversary of Rio Grande Reservoir on August 23rd, 2012, preparation for the repairs was underway. In 2013, construction began thanks to Deere and Ault Consultants and CMI Const., Inc. This was such a monumental project that not even the West Fork Complex Fire could stop it. By fall 2013, Phase 1 of the Rio Grande Cooperative Project was complete. An idea had become reality. It was not an easy road at times, but Smith's grit and persistence eventually paid off.

Smith was presented with the Wayne N. Aspinall Award on January 27th, 2017 at the conclusion of the Colorado Water Congress Annual Convention in Denver. Smith expressed that he was "humbled" and "honored" to be counted among his heroes. Many family and friends were present for the surprise and Travis has joked that he is "concerned about all his sneaky friends." There was also a delightful video presentation put together by family and Moxiecran Media Executive Producer, Christi Bode, which was counted a smashing success, and is "the best six minute western you'll ever watch."

(Information taken from the Wayne N. Aspinall Award taken from the coloradowatercongress.org)

FUNDING

Basin Account Balance:

\$303,000

Statewide Account Balance:

Applications for funding from the Statewide WSRF account have exceeded the available funding. Pending legislative approval, additional funding will be added to the WSRF account in July.

SNOWPACK

Currently, the Rio Grande Basin snowpack is at:

148% OF AVERAGE.

SUBDISTRICTS

SUBDISTRICT 3 Conejos:

was approved by the judge in January.

SUBDISTRICT 4 San Luis Creek:

will go before the courts this spring.

SUBDISTRICT 6 Alamosa-La Jara:

is currently working on petitions.

LINK TO ARTICLES, RADIO SPOTS AND VIDEO VIGNETTES:

Please visit <http://www.rgbrt.org/education-and-outreach.html>

TELL US WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE NEWSLETTER!

Email: Info@RioGrandeHeadwaters.org



THE CONEJOS WINTER FLOW PROGRAM

Written By Helen Smith

The Conejos Winter Flow Program brings a fresh approach and new ideas to an old challenge. It is all about a collaborative perspective and methodology through which water in the San Luis Valley is used during the winter months. This program has fostered communication between entities that have previously not worked together, uncovering a new space for creative thinking about how we can maximize the resource to meet the many demands. The team, led by Trout Unlimited includes the Conejos Water Conservancy District, the Division of Water Resources, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District, the Rio Grande Water Users and The San Luis Valley Irrigation District. The result is a cooperative effort to improve the utilization of water for multiple benefits to the water community and the environment, through winter releases of reservoir water below Platoro Reservoir. Kevin Terry of Trout Unlimited who also serves on the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable shared a few thoughts on this process and why it is beneficial.

Kevin works for TU national in the Western Water and Habitat Program. The goal of this program is to partner with water users, especially the agricultural sector to find win-win solutions for fish and farms. The Conejos Winter Flow Program is a great example of how that can work. The San Luis Valley chapter of Colorado Trout Unlimited has also increased its involvement in watershed health issues in recent years. For example, the local TU chapter has partnered with the Conejos River Anglers, the US Forest Service, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife in on-the-ground restoration projects along the Conejos River. The restoration work ties directly to the flow work to improve habitat for wild populations of trout. The Conejos Winter Flow Program was developed to serve the needs of stakeholders on the Conejos River. The Conejos Winter Flow Program was developed to serve the needs of stakeholders on the Conejos River. This program is designed to help bring a more consistent flow pattern on the Conejos River during the winter for the improvement of habitat. Terry explained that Trout Unlimited believes in conservation coming as a result of

partnerships with all stakeholders in a watershed. This is where the Conejos Water Conservancy District and the other program partners come in. These stakeholders are getting involved because they are seeing this is not only a benefit to the river, but a benefit to their operations as well. The Program is completely voluntary which allows stakeholders to identify opportunities to meet their own needs, such as well augmentation, by increasing flows. So, while the water may delivered for the primary purpose of augmentation, a crucial piece to the basin-wide pursuit of balance and sustainability between surface and groundwater irrigation, the secondary benefit is an increase in flows which improves habitat for fish and wildlife. That is when we see the win-win situation for all parties involved.

Terry has seen challenges and rewards throughout the process. The biggest challenge has been leaving the past in the past to build fresh partnerships and trust. The reward has been watching trust develop and the partnership strengthen, all while hitting the target of a 3cfs increase for 5 months (42% increase). Terry has enjoyed the creative process where people who have previously never even considered the idea of winter flow needs approach him with ideas. While Terry is now thinking about ways to help farmers and ranchers, those farmers and ranchers in turn are thinking about ways to benefit the river and its fish. This collaborative effort has resulted in improved communication which, in turn, has brought together what Terry calls a “dynamic” and “adaptable” team that shares a common mission. That mission is to take care of the river and improve habitat and at the same time take care of the water users and the needs of the water community. The CWFP has enabled Trout Unlimited and program partners to seize opportunities to maximize the benefits of our most valuable resource. A healthier river is starting to take shape as a result.

WANT TO KNOW HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED?

Visit RGBRT.org or email

Info@RioGrandeHeadwaters.org

PARTNER HIGHLIGHT:

THE SAN LUIS VALLEY WATER CONSERVANCY DISTRICT

Written By Helen Smith



PHOTO: HEATHER DUTTON

The Rio Grande Roundtable is a place where public and private entities can come together and be a part of the decision-making process. The result of this process is that conversations that otherwise might not happen have taken place. It is a place where the status quo has been challenged, new initiatives have taken shape and collaboration has happened. All of this work would not be possible if it were not for the great organizations that have a place in the roundtable. The San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District is one of those organizations. Founded in 1949, the district's initial aim was to study and construct reservoirs on the Rio Grande in conjunction with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Those reservoirs never came to pass due to a lack of local consensus, but by 1972 the district's leaders had redirected the organization to begin providing augmentation water for small well owners who needed to comply with state groundwater rules and regulations. The district's initial augmentation program served parts of Alamosa, Rio Grande and Saguache counties, but as residential growth expanded toward the headwaters of the Rio Grande, landowners in Hinsdale and Mineral counties have also petitioned into the district. Today, the district continues to serve homeowners and businesses, said Heather Dutton, who is both the district's manager and the roundtable's vice-chair. The commercial well owners served by the district now include a variety of industries from solar farms to chicken egg farms, vegetable and marijuana greenhouses and potato warehouses. The district has also served as a springboard for the Rio Grande Water Leaders Course and the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project, thanks in part to funding provided through the Colorado Water Conservation Board via the roundtable. Dutton values the roundtable for the opportunities it offers diverse groups to network, collaborate and even partner on projects. Moreover, it's an important opportunity to learn about water in the San Luis Valley. "We care about the greater efforts of the water community outside our service area," she said.