



RIO GRANDE BASIN ROUNDTABLE NEWSLETTER

VOL 3. ISSUE 1

JAN-MAR 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PG. 1

Welcome

Article: State of the Basin

Upcoming Events

Legislative/Water Court

PG. 2

Roundtable Summit

Spruce Lakes Project

PG. 3

Article: Day Zero

Roundtable Member Profile

PG. 4

Article: Day Zero cont.

Arkansas Basin Water Forum

PG. 5

Water Export Opposition

Water Leaders Course

UPCOMING EVENTS

NEXT RT MEETING:

NO APRIL MEETING

May 14, 2019 at 2 pm

SLVWCD Conference Room

SPECIAL EVENT - RIO GRANDE

COMPACT MEETING

Colorado Hosts Texas & NM

April 3-4, 2019

Rio Grande Water Conservation District Office

LEGISLATIVE/WATER COURT

Colorado Division of Water Resources is still waiting on the final decision of Judge Pattie Swift regarding well rules & regulations for District 3. The trial concluded February 2018.

WELCOME!

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

STATE OF THE BASIN WATER SYMPOSIUM ENCOURAGES EDUCATION

Written by Bethany Howell, PEPO

It is safe to say that the community of the San Luis Valley cares about its water - even if we don't always know everything about it. The State of the Basin symposium hosted by the Salazar Rio Grande Del Norte Center at Adams State University on Saturday, February 23 aimed to change that just a little bit. With a wide variety of speakers, the symposium touched on major issues affecting the Rio Grande River basin. The audience of approximately 200 community members were treated to an entire day of water education facilitated by water agencies, non-profits, and Adams State through morning talks and afternoon break-out sessions. Program Director Rio de la Vista welcomed the crowd at 9 am, then turned the program over to speakers from the Rio Grande Water Conservation District like Amber Pacheco and Cleave Simpson, the Colorado Division of Water Resources with Division 3 engineer Craig Cotten, and San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District manager Heather Dutton. Most of the speakers discussed the dire water year of 2018 and its consequences on the groundwater and surface water sustainability into this year, but highlighted proactive efforts through the subdistricts and new technology to address these harsh realities. Heather Dutton spoke on the role of the Colorado Water Conservation Board as its Rio Grande representative, and acknowledged the hard work of Becky Mitchell and her staff to support the Rio Grande basin. The keynote address from Attorney General Phil Weiser also addressed the need for collaboration across the basin in regards to water sustainability and noted that water exportation across basins to meet growing population needs on the Front Range was not in the Valley's best interests. Ken Salazar also expressed his disagreement with the proposed water export plan and gave a brief history of how the SLV has banded together to defeat similar propositions. The keynote ended with the opportunity for audience members to ask questions. The



discussion oriented mode for the day continued into the afternoon with break out sessions on topics from subdistricts to education, recreation, and conservation easements.

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser and Ken Salazar give their opinions about Colorado's water future.

Photo by Aaron Miltenberger **PG. 1**



September
25th-26th
2019

BASIN
ROUNDTABLE
STATEWIDE
SUMMIT

HEADWATERS CENTER
730 BAKER DRIVE
WINTER PARK, CO 80482

The CWCB is planning an incredible opportunity for roundtable members from all basins in Colorado this September to discuss basin implementation planning, integration of the Water Plan technical analysis, and more.

Registration Fee:

Free for Roundtable, CWCB board, and IBCC members, \$75 for others.

Register at eventbrite.com under C-9: Statewide Summit of Colorado's 9 Basin Roundtables

COLORADO WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

RIO GRANDE BASIN CONTACT: MEGAN HOLCOMB MEGAN.HOLCOMB@STATE.CO.US

CWCB REPRESENTATIVE: HEATHER DUTTON HEATHER@SLVWCD.ORG

NEW CWCB GRANT CONTACT: ELGIN TURNER ELGIN.TURNER@STATE.CO.US

[HTTP://CWCB.STATE.CO.US](http://CWCB.STATE.CO.US)

SPRUCE LAKES WILDERNESS RESERVOIR MAINTENANCE PROJECT

Sometimes you just need to think outside the box...way outside. And that's exactly what Kevin Terry of Trout Unlimited and Rio Grande National Forest staff did with funding from the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable. The cooperative partnership between private, state, federal and non-profit entities benefited two reservoirs in the Weminuche Wilderness that protect private water rights as well as maximize the benefits of water and infrastructure for the public. Located at the headwaters of the South Fork of the Rio Grande, Spruce Lakes are completely surrounded by the Weminuche Wilderness. Unfortunately, large swathes of beetle kill spruce trees have been falling into the reservoirs and clogging up spillways, leading to dam safety concerns and potential storage restrictions. But, the wilderness limited the tools available to those hoping to relieve the burden now placed on private water rights holders. Heavy machinery and chainsaws aren't allowed, and sawyers alone couldn't cut it. Trout Unlimited (TU) has been involved with this project since 2013, teaming up with the water rights owners to work on the area. But the 2013 work just wasn't enough. That's when they lit on the idea of using explosives, a wilderness friendly tool. With dynamite, the partners would be able to directionally fall about 400 standing dead spruce trees that were within reach of the lakes. In just one day, using hundreds of pounds of explosive materials flown in by helicopter, the trees in the danger zone were felled in a safe, supervised manner. Within seconds of detonation, trout were observed feeding once again on the surface of the lakes. Using the chopper instead of pack horses or mules relieved the stress that might have impacted the trail leading to the lakes and cut travel time for the explosives into minutes. Now, the Spruce Lakes Reservoirs just need a little more cleaning of debris, but the imminent danger of tree fall is past - thanks to some creativity & collaboration.

ROUNDTABLE PROJECT FUNDS: \$65,499.38



Above: Beetle kill spruce clog the spillways of Spruce Lakes Reservoirs

Below: Trees tied with explosives are ready for detonation.



Photos courtesy of Kevin Terry

DAY ZERO IS COMING - WILL IT BE IN OUR LIFETIME? By Bethany Howell, PEPO

When you live in a dry region, there's nothing more beautiful than the sound of rain. Growing up, I loved hearing a good old-fashioned thunderstorm crashing through the sky. As an adult, living in West Texas for six years meant that I very rarely heard a raindrop hitting the ground. Moving to the San Luis Valley five years ago has been a lesson in waiting nine months of the year for those few weeks when we are blessed with monsoons. I never get tired of watching storm clouds roll in, the sudden drop in pressure, the smell of ozone rising, and then finally, the sweet pitter patter of fat water droplets weaving rivulets through dry soil.

No one who lives in an arid, high alpine desert such as the San Luis Valley takes for granted those short bursts of welcome water, especially not when we know those rainstorms are capricious beasts. In 2017, the Valley received record amounts of rain, enough to put us on the national weather map. In 2018, the parched irrigation ditches and thirsty crops reminded us that once again, Mother Nature had chosen to withhold. Weather patterns, climate change, all of these major events are beyond our control. Humans have ever been at the mercy of weather, that's why we choose to settle at the bottom of mountains where the snows melt into the rivers if we are in a rain-deprived area. Traditional acequias were built purposely to catch every last bit of snowmelt, direct it onto the crops, and then allow it to continue on its way for downstream neighbors. Rain and snow are the only ways that Colorado receives fresh water, and it's the only water we have for crop irrigation, recreation, and municipal use, which includes the small percentage of water that is considered potable, or drinkable.



A water filling station in Capetown, South Africa
Photo credit: Red Ice.TV

When the snow doesn't come and our irrigation ditches in the San Luis Valley suffer, we commiserate with our farmers and ranchers, but it doesn't stop us from running a hot shower after a sweaty workout, or filling our coffeepot for that sweet jolt of caffeine first thing in the morning. So why should the average community member care? Day Zero sounds like a high budget action movie starring Hugh Jackman as a single father rescuing his children and the rest of the world from alien invasion. In fact, it is a very real event that has already occurred in areas around the world, most recently and notably in the region of Capetown, South Africa. South Africans realized in the early 1990's that their area would very soon, as in within twenty years soon, run completely out of water. They were dependent on a system of reservoirs to capture rainfall, which has always been in plentiful supply from the storms off the coast.

continued on page 4

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.rgbt.org.



JUDY LOPEZ - SECRETARY, CONSERVATION MEMBER AT LARGE

Judy works as the SLV conservation project manager for Colorado Open Lands. She previously acted as the PEPO liaison and has been a part of the Roundtable since 2008. After working in education and garnering numerous accolades over many years, she shifted to her current role in actively conserving natural assets of key San Luis Valley properties. Judy is a native Coloradan who lives with her husband and 2 dogs on their ranch east of Alamosa and enjoys fishing, camping, and exploring the backcountry with her family.

KNOW YOUR WATER, UNDERSTAND COLORADO - ARKANSAS RIVER BASIN HOSTS WATER FORUM



For more information or to register, visit arbwf.org or contact Kristie Nackord at arbwf1994@gmail.com

Everyone is invited to the annual Arkansas River Basin water forum “A River of Dreams and Realities,” a special 25th anniversary celebration on April 24-25 at the Pueblo Convention Center. The conference features keynote speakers Sen. Cory Gardner and former Agricultural Commissioner Don Ament. Program highlights include a 25 year retrospective of the crucial nature of water in the Arkansas River Basin from state and basin wide perspectives and presentations and panel discussions by some of the leading water experts in the state. Of special interest is the demands and challenges of acquiring water for growing communities.

In Colorado, water makes everything possible. To know water is to better understand our state.

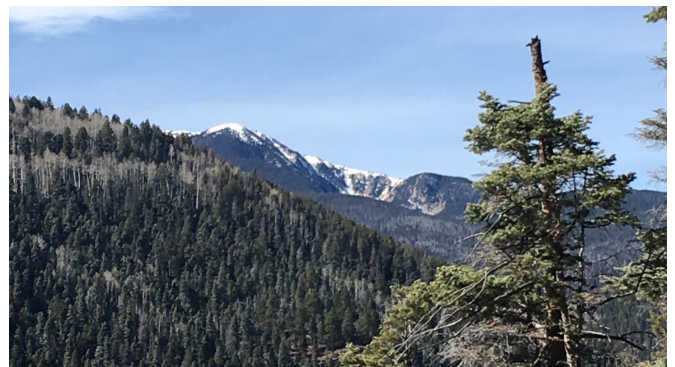
DAY ZERO IS COMING...

cont.

But years of increasing population, increasing water use, inefficient water storage, and weather patterns that resulted in areas of extreme drought meant that within a very short window of time, the taps would run dry in a city with a population of almost 500,000. City officials moved quickly, and with a date of April 21, 2018 set for Day Zero, prepared water restrictions, conservation measures, and an emergency action plan for the current water supply. Through sheer determination and the cooperation of its thousands of citizens, Capetown narrowly averted a major disaster – but not entirely. Although the date of Day Zero was pushed back to 2019, it hasn't been completely eliminated. Day Zero is still a very real and very scary reality for Capetown. Capetown isn't the first world city to face a water disaster of epic proportions.

In 2008, Barcelona, Spain was forced to import water for its citizens after years of unprecedented drought. Other world cities such as New Delhi, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Istanbul, Tokyo, Beijing, and the closer to home cities of San Diego, Las Vegas, Miami, and San Antonio are facing a drinking water emergency within the next few years (if not months). It isn't a stretch to say that Denver or other Colorado municipalities could soon join the list. Scaring people into caring about water didn't work in Capetown's case, and it shouldn't be what we in Colorado resort to either. We don't want to police the water system (that's what the water courts are for, after all), but we do want to be aware that while water used to be a given for generations – no longer. If you've lived in the San Luis Valley for any length of time you've already discovered that we don't see much precipitation. Every bit of water is useful and necessary, whether for agriculture, municipal use, or just to dip our feet into on a hot day. And that's not even scratching the surface of the needs of vegetation, habitat, and wildlife. In fact, just in the past few months, citizens in Paonia discovered just how unpleasant life becomes without the surety of water. After 2018's incredibly dry weather and resulting consequences for ground and

surface water, the natural springs that rural residents rely upon were no longer able to supply water to their wells. After prioritizing the city and businesses, officials were able to bring the rest of the area back into water use. But several days went by before water was effectively flowing through the pipes again. Anyone who has a domestic well knows the terrifying moment when you realize your well is no longer pumping water. Suddenly, you remember that you needed to do three loads of laundry, run the dishwasher, and most of your family wants to take a shower before bed. Instead, you're melting snow on top of the woodburning stove, just enough to pour into the toilet tank for the essential flush. Imagine doing this for several days in a row, not to mention hauling water so you can cook dinner or wash your hands. Suddenly, the impact of no easy access to water becomes an all-encompassing issue for daily life. The same scenario is playing out in parts of California as I write this. In a region completely dependent on the amount of snow we receive each year for groundwater recharge, no wonder we glue ourselves to the snowpack report...or should.



The Sangre de Cristo mountain range in Feb. 2018 - snowless. Photo: Santa Fe Reporter

SAN LUIS VALLEY ORGANIZATIONS OFFICIALLY OPPOSE WATER EXPORT PLAN

Board members of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District passed a resolution opposing the proposed water export plan by Renewable Water Resources representatives. Manager Cleave Simpson presented the resolution and possible strategies for going forward to the district's board at their January 15th meeting. The board agreed that any export of water from the Rio Grande basin that impacted its culture, water users, and economy would not be supported by the District.

On February 21, 2019, the board of the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District also voted to oppose Renewable Water Resources' water export proposal through a resolution of their own. The district, which includes portions of Hinsdale, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Alamosa counties, as well as Saguache county where the export is proposed, has similar concerns to the Rio Grande Water Conservation district. These concerns include disrupting the strict administration of surface water rights and groundwater wells in an over-appropriated basin.

RIO GRANDE WATER LEADERS COURSE 2019!

After a hiatus in 2018, the Rio Grande Water Leaders course returned March 4-8 with a full slate of presenters and one of the biggest cohorts to date. Intended to give participants a comprehensive overview of water in the Valley, presenters from a diverse array of partners discussed local hydrology and geology, water law, conservation easements, water rights, augmentation, subdistricts, the radar forecasting project, and much more. The course is supported by the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, the SLV Water Conservancy District, the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project, the Conejos Water Conservancy District, and the Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education Initiative.



Course participants (left) listen to David Robbins, longtime water attorney, describe the history of water law in Colorado. David and fellow attorney Bill Paddock have an amazing wealth of information.

Does the San Luis Valley have water to spare? Read facts, not fiction. Visit the Rio Grande Water Conservation District website to see unconfined aquifer data mapping from the 1970's to the present. Download streamflow information from the Colorado Division of Water Resources dating back a hundred years. And much more!
WWW.RGWCD.ORG
WWW.DWR.STATE.CO.US

Additionally, the districts are concerned about the potential for dry-up of agricultural lands near important ecological and cultural resources such as the Blanca Wetlands near the Great Sand Dunes National Park. Although a buyer for the proposed export has yet to be identified, water leaders in the Rio Grande Basin are watching any projects that impact water users from municipal to agricultural to wildlife.

"...(exporting water) would put additional strain on an already stressed water supply system and threaten the future sustainability of the San Luis Valley's water supply, ecosystems, communities, and economy."
SLV Water Conservancy District resolution

To read the full resolutions from each district, please visit their websites listed below:

[Rio Grande Water Conservation District](http://RioGrandeWaterConservationDistrict.org)
www.rgwcd.org

[San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District](http://SanLuisValleyWaterConservancyDistrict.org)
www.slvwcd.org

At this time, no further information has been given to either of these entities from Renewable Water Resources

**LIKE WHAT YOU READ? LET US KNOW,
OR GIVE US MORE NEWS TO SHARE!
CONTACT BETHANY HOWELL, PEPO
R G W C E I @ G M A I L . C O M**