



Photo Credit: Heather Dutton

WELCOME!

The RGBRT fosters cooperation in Colorado's Rio Grande basin through support of multi-purpose projects that help us manage, protect, and sustain water use for today and into the future. The Roundtable exists to make stuff happen! Check out our website: <http://rgbirt.org/>

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Upcoming Events:

● RGBRT Meeting- Dec. 13

The December RGBRT meeting will be at Nino's in Alamosa at 12:30 pm on December 13th. Lunch will be provided! There will not be a Zoom option available.

● RGBRT Meeting- Jan 10

The January RT meeting will be on the 10th at the Rio Grande Water Conservation District Office, located at 8805 Independence Way in Alamosa, from 2- 4 PM, with an Executive Committee Meeting starting at 1 PM. The Education Committee will meet at 11 AM at the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District Office, located at 623 4th St. in Alamosa. Visit the [RGBRT website](http://rgbirt.org/) for Zoom links to attend virtually!

Roundtable Member Highlight:



Peter Clark

Rio Grande Water Users Member at Large

Peter Clark is an At Large Member for the Roundtable. He farms and ranches along the Rio Grande/ Alamosa County. Peter has B.S. in Range Management from Humboldt State University and enjoyed a successful career in the United States Forest Service. He enjoys hunting with vintage or replica firearms and preparing the ammunition.

Water Views: Like soil, water is a basic resource and is necessary for every aspect of our lives. Managing water properly ensures a stable economy, an abundant food supply and diverse recreational opportunities.



With funding provided by the Colorado Water Conservation Board, the RGBRT supports projects within the Rio Grande Basin that benefit the health of the watershed and the communities that live here. Below are some project highlights from the RGBRT-sponsored projects that have been completed this year:

The Richfield Project was completed in December of 2021 on the Conejos River. Grouted rock diversion structures, sluice gates, and automatic controls were installed on three sites: the Salazar, the Seledonia Valdez/San Jose, and the Richfield ditch. Rock structures were installed to stabilize streambanks. Additionally, a downward-facing sonar measuring device was installed at the CONCONCO river site just north of Antonito. This technology will assist with more accurate low flow measurements needed to properly pay compact and deliver Conejos main channel priority diversions.

The 2021 Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan (BIP) was published this January. The 2021 BIP revised the 2015 BIP, utilizing data and water-use analyses from the Technical Update to the Colorado Water Plan to develop goals and strategies to meet the Basin's current and future water needs. Check out Volumes I and II [here](#), or get an overview of the BIP through the interactive [Story Map!](#)

The Billings Ditch Improvement Project was completed in the spring of 2022 in time for water users to divert their appropriated water by the beginning of irrigation season. This project included construction of a grouted rock diversion with fish passage, a concrete headgate with automation, and replacement of multiple ditch control gates. Installation of rock structures and planting of new native riparian vegetation on surrounding streambanks were also completed as part of this project. Overall, project efforts resulted in improved water management, diversion efficiency, riparian and aquatic habitat, and water quality.

Three multi-benefit agricultural diversion improvement projects have been completed on the South Branch of the Conejos River at the Sabine School Section, Fuerticitos, and Elledges ditches as part of the Conejos River Partnership Project (CRPP). Each of these projects replaced the existing headgate and diversion, stabilized the surrounding banks, and improved aquatic and riparian habitat, resulting in enhanced water quality, decreased maintenance needs, and improved water access and administration.

Education efforts in 2022 have covered 12 distinct water topics specific to the Rio Grande Basin. Topics ranged from irrigation and SLV agriculture to fishing and boating to wetland and riparian habitat. Throughout 2022, seventeen [articles](#) were published according to the monthly education theme, with accompanying one-page factsheets. "Cross-Basin" articles, written by partners in other Colorado river basins, were published in parallel to the RGBRT's articles to describe how this topic plays out in other areas of the state. In addition, the RGBRT has coordinated four day-long tours this year to showcase the innovative water projects being implemented in watersheds around the state. These tours, open to anyone in the community, highlighted firsthand the work being done at Trinchera Blanca Ranch, and in the Gunnison, Culebra, and Rio Grande Basins. The RGBRT, in support of Water Education Colorado's Water 22 campaign, hosted booths at the Monte Vista Crane Festival and the Rio Trio Adventure Triathlon to spread awareness of how Coloradans can conserve and protect their water resources.

With the successes of 2022, the RGBRT looks forward to another exciting and project-packed year. The RGBRT wishes everyone a Happy Holiday and New Year, and looks forward to having familiar and new faces at future RGBRT meetings!



Want to stay up to date? Subscribe to our newsletter at info.rgbrt@gmail.com and follow us on our [Facebook Page!](#)

We're also happy to share statewide initiatives, events, and other water-centric programs on our Facebook Page, website calendar, and in this newsletter! Email info.rgbrt@gmail.com with content you wish to share!



Virtually all of us in the San Luis Valley are familiar with the abundant, well distributed, and easily accessible non-native trout fisheries that bless our watershed, providing countless hours of recreation for residents and visitors each and every year. A lesser number of people are aware of our only native trout, the Rio Grande cutthroat, and even fewer people can access recreational Rio Grande cutthroat fisheries, as they are mostly isolated to high elevation lakes and streams. These spots lie completely off the beaten path for all but a few people, mostly agency managers. Even lesser known are our two other native fish that have always called the Rio Grande home. These beautiful native fish are the Rio Grande sucker and the Rio Grande Chub, and they currently occupy only a small portion of their historic range in the San Luis Valley.

While you can technically fish for both species, it's extremely rare for modern anglers to target the small-bodied chub or the bottom-dwelling suckers. While the Rio Grande Sucker is so rare that we don't encourage angling at all, there are a couple of places for the adventurous angler to target Rio Grande chub. There are also really cool ways to interact with these fish by visiting the places they live, immersing yourself in the ecosystems that support them. Often these places have physical, hydrological, and biological characteristics that stand out from other better-known streams. These attributes provide a change of setting and make for a great way to see another side of the Valleys aquatic resources.

Both species are considered Species of Special Concern in the State of Colorado, and they are currently being evaluated for federal protections. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW)— alongside agency partners including the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS)— is working hard to protect, restore, and reintroduce these fish throughout the Valley. For nearly a decade, CPW and the USFWS have worked to restore and reconnect habitat on the Baca National Wildlife Refuge, and are currently planning and designing a project to reintroduce both species to the McIntyre-Simpson Wetlands Area in the lower Conejos River system. Also in-action off the beaten path near Alamosa is the [J. W. Mumma Native Aquatic Species Restoration Facility \(NASRF\)](#), a CPW hatchery dedicated to protecting and restoring threatened and endangered aquatic species native to Colorado. Get in touch with the hatchery and take the time to visit this state-of-the-art facility!

The Chub and Sucker occupy different ecological niches, but do well in similar habitat. Both species like slow moving water in low gradient streams with complex habitat features including large wood (keep wood out of ditches and leave it in the river!) for cover and aquatic vegetation for foraging. Beaver ponds create this desired complex habitat and increase habitat resilience. In recent years, [process-based restoration](#) has been identified as a tool that mimics these beaver ponds to restore aquatic ecosystems, opening the door for stream habitats that are suitable for the complete native fish assemblage— an absolute indicator of a healthy aquatic ecosystem. Most of our chub populations in Colorado are located below 9,000 feet in elevation with a few exceptions. Given the habitat preference and the fact that a lot of the lower elevation lands are privately held, please consider reaching out to CPW to see if your property has suitable habitat. Private lands are critical for our efforts to secure the species and help us avoid federal listing. The chub is a rather resilient species that can even persist and thrive in stock ponds, so you might be surprised to find that you have good habitat already in place!

Pictured below are the Rio Grande Chub and the Rio Grande sucker, respectively. Photo Credits: Dan Cammack



As a fisheries biologist and a project manager, I do a lot of research on the computer and attend a lot of meetings, but I always find that getting out on the ground is where I learn the most. So I encourage you to get off the beaten path too. You can see the habitat that Rio Grande Suckers use by visiting Medano Creek on the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. The National Park Service and CPW have done a fantastic job reintroducing both the Rio Grande cutthroat and the Rio Grande Sucker. Combining efforts with these organizations is a vibrant population of beaver that are creating and managing habitat, working for free around the clock. While you're at Medano Creek, be sure to bring a rod and fish a couple of these beaver ponds to enjoy Colorado's most robust Rio Grande cutthroat population (please tread lightly). Another remote place where an angler can target Rio Grande Chub— and catch them to their hearts delight— is a newly discovered population in Swale Lake. Swale Lake can be reached by four-wheel drive on the Handkerchief Mesa trail (844) which you can access from the Park Creek road (FS 280) near South Fork. Use small flies and lures to target the Chub and they will take small spinners readily— and yes "micro-fishing" is a lot of fun! Anglers fishing the middle and lower sections of the Rio Grande in Colorado might already be familiar with catching Rio Grande chub, as CPW has a robust stocking program and there is plenty of good habitat. Along with habitat challenges, the larger threat to chub in the Rio Grande is from predation by non-native species, including the Northern Pike. Pike are ambush predators that often strike near shore and slowly follow prey or lures all the way in, so watch out for an extra surprise when landing a chub, especially if you're catching them by hand!

Get off the beaten path and enjoy your native fish and the incredible places they live!

