



Photo Credit: Erin McWilliams

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://rgbrt.org/>

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Upcoming Events:

Fish Hatchery Tour

The RGBRT is organizing a trip to the [CPW Native Aquatic Species Restoration Facility](#) in Alamosa on April 19. Event signup has closed.

May RGBRT Meeting

The May RGBRT meeting will be held on May 9 at the Rio Grande Water Conservation District Office, located at 8805 Independence Way in Alamosa, from 2- 4PM, with an Executive Committee Session starting at 1PM. 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](#) for Zoom links to attend.

State of the Basin Symposium

The fifth annual Rio Grande State of the Basin Symposium will be held on May 6 beginning at 8AM on the Adam's State University campus. The event is free and open to the public. For more info, or to register, contact cnsaenz@adams.edu.

Southwest Basin Tour

The RGBRT is organizing an overnight trip to the Southwest Basin May 11-12. Tour includes Ute Mountain Ute Farm and Ranch, McPhee Reservoir, and other local stops. Stay tuned for details and an RSVP!

Valley Bottom Rio Trio

Registration for the third annual Rio Trio Triathlon is open! The race, set for May 27th, includes an 8-mile bike, a 3-mile paddle on the Rio Grande, and a 5k run! For more information, visit the [race website](#).



Visit Page 2 for a recap of our March 29th Snow Survey Tour at Wolf Creek Pass and Ski Area

The Roundtable and Education Committee meet on the second Tuesday of each month. Visit rgbrt.org for meeting times and virtual attendance options.



April 1st kicked off the 2023 irrigation season. Here's to a good water year!

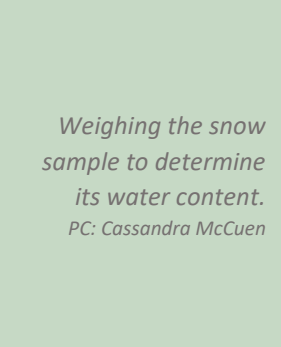


Snow Survey Tour Recap

By Cassandra McCuen



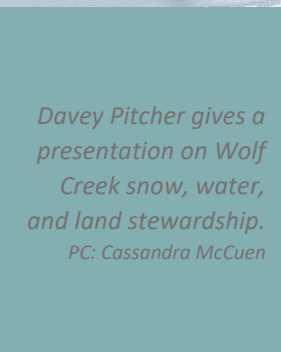
*Measuring snow depth and obtaining a snowpack sample.
PC: Cassandra McCuen*



*Weighing the snow sample to determine its water content.
PC: Cassandra McCuen*



*NRCS SNOTEL site.
PC: Heather Dutton*



*Davey Pitcher gives a presentation on Wolf Creek snow, water, and land stewardship.
PC: Cassandra McCuen*

In March the RGBRT snowshoed to the [Wolf Creek Pass Snow Telemetry Site](#), also known as SNOTEL, to see firsthand how NRCS measures snowpack and snow water equivalent, and how these measurements influence [streamflow forecasting](#). Tour participants also got to visit with Wolf Creek Ski Area to learn about their water, snow, and land stewardship.

In the high elevation backcountry of Colorado's Rio Grande Basin, NRCS manually measures snow depth and snow water equivalent (SWE) throughout nine snow courses. Ron Riggensch of NRCS began our tour by demonstrating how these measurements are taken using a snow tube. Riggensch thrust the cold aluminum tube into the snow until he reached dirt, which to the group's amazement, was nearly too deep! When removed, the previously hollow tube extracted a snowpack sample that was weighed to determine its water content. He noted that not all snow is created equal, and to get the whole picture, we can't solely rely on snow depth- lower quantities of wet snow may yield the same runoff as more, dry snow. Meanwhile, Riggensch's NRCS partner, Beau Temple, recorded the data and took other site notes. Samples like these would be repeated 5 to 10 times to complete the full snow course, but for the sake of everyone's frozen toes, we left that to the NRCS staff for another time.

After a short uphill snowshoe, we arrived at the Wolf Creek Pass SNOTEL site, which is just one of 17 that monitor our basin. This site had all kinds of monitoring equipment: a snow pillow, a tower loaded with various sensors such as wind speed, a precipitation gauge, and an equipment shed containing batteries and solar panels. Riggensch explained how these NRCS-operated weather stations continuously measure and transmit accumulated precipitation, SWE, soil moisture, and air and soil temperature data. Using SNOTEL and snow course data, the NRCS National Water and Climate Center in Portland, Oregon will estimate our streamflow forecasts.

The NRCS and water officials throughout the San Luis Valley are constantly on a mission to improve the accuracy of

streamflow forecasting. This includes filling in data gaps like adding more sites where needed, or measuring more environmental factors that might influence runoff, like soil moisture or dust-on-snow. Accurate streamflow forecasting is crucial to accurately predicting Colorado's annual Rio Grande Compact delivery requirements to New Mexico. And, the more we can fine-tune that, we can strike a balance that lessens the burden on our water users.

Our tour wrapped up at Wolf Creek Ski Area, a well-earned reprieve from the cold that resulted in very full bellies of pizza. Davey Pitcher, CEO, discussed the area's felt responsibility to lessen their impacts and act as environmental stewards of our headwaters. Some of their practices include regular trash cleanups, using biodegradable oils in their machinery, and biannual water quality monitoring of their major streams. Additionally, Wolf Creek contracts with the Colorado State Forest Service to complete small-scale removal of dead timber to support overall forest health, an effort made possible by the Colorado State Forest Service and U.S Forest Service's "Good Neighbor Agreement." He also described Wolf Creek's water augmentation plan through the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District (SLVWCD), currently managed by Heather Dutton.

In 1989, the Pitchers recognized the need to add snowmaking to their operation as a buffer for drought years to sustain their business. With no opportunity to appropriate a new water right (by then, the Rio Grande had been fully appropriated for several decades), they sought out a deal with the SLVWCD to develop an [augmentation plan](#).



Today, this plan supports Wolf Creek’s capacity to store up to 1.5 million gallons (4.6 acre-feet) of water for snow making without any injury to other water users. Only a portion of this water is used every year, and the water they do use works hard. DWR allows them to recapture up to 80% of the water they used for snowmaking at the end of each season, which is stored and reused next season. The remaining 20% of water that is considered “consumed,” or lost to factors like wind and evaporation, gets diverted and augmented with a quick email to Dutton. Pitcher noted that their snowmaking operation has served them well in drought years and allows them to kickstart their season and open with more consistency each year, which benefits both their employees and the economies that rely on the tourism generated by the area. Overall, Wolf Creek continually strives to be a friend to the watershed and the local community.

A big thank you to the Roundtable Education Committee, Ron Rigenbach, Beau Temple; and Davey, Rosanne, Keith and Chris Pitcher for making this amazing tour happen. “The good times just keep on rolling!” -Heather Dutton, and probably someone else.



PC: Daniel Boyes

New Roundtable Appointments

Congratulations to everyone on their new appointments! In case you missed our last meeting:

Heather Dutton *RGBRT Chair*

Kevin Terry *RGBRT Vice- Chair*

Nathan Coombs *CWCB Board Member, RGBRT representative*

Daniel Boyes *Watershed Health Representative*

Judy Jolly *PEPO Coordinator*

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!

New CWCB Staff Highlight:



Laura Spann

CWCB Regional Water Plan Grant Manager

Laura joined the Colorado Water Conservation Board in late 2022. She helps project proponents navigate the state’s many water funding opportunities available, specifically Water Plan Grants. Laura attends Roundtable meetings to learn more about Rio Grande water issues and projects. She grew up irrigating on her family’s Upper Gunnison Basin cattle ranch and has lived in Durango since 2013. She enjoys exploring the San Juan mountains with her young son.

Water views: In the words of Paul Bruchez, it’s time to “Build the Water Plan.”

