

Drought Contingency Planning – Demand Management Subcommittee Southwest Basins Roundtable

Dolores Water Conservancy District, 65 Cactus Drive, Cortez, Colorado
January 15, 2020 12:30 p.m.-2:30 p.m.

Roundtable Members Present:

Ken Beegles, At Large
Greg Black, At Large
Keith Caddy, Montrose County
John Currier, Colorado River WCD
Ken Curtis, At Large
Karen Gugliemone, San Miguel County Municipality
Becky Williams, Hinsdale County
Steve Harris, Legislative Appointee
Celene Hawkins, CWCB Board
Kenny Heldman, Montrose County

Brandon Johnson, At Large
Phil Johnson, Montezuma County Municipalities
Frank Kugel, SW Water Conservation District
Ed Millard, Montezuma County
Peter Ortego, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe
Al Pfister, San Juan Water Conservancy District
Mike Preston, At Large
Kathy Rall Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Ed Tolen, At Large
Mely Whiting, At Large

Other Subcommittee Members Present:

Russ Sands, Colorado Water Conservation Board
Don Schwindt, Dolores Water Conservancy District
Andrew Straub-Heidke, Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Bob Wolff, SW Water Conservation District

Public:

Carolyn Dunmire, Montezuma Land Conservancy
Steve Garchar, Dolores County Commissioner
Russ George, Interbasin Compact Committee Director
Chad Hill, City of Cortez
Eric Hjerstad, Western Weather Consultants
Jamie Johnson, Montezuma Land Conservancy
Emily Kasyon, Southwest Conservation Corps
Amanda Kuenzi, Animas River Community Forum
Godwin Oliver, Dolores Water Conservancy District
Doug Pickering, Division of Water Resources
Gigi Richard, Four Corners Water Resources Center
Bruce Smart, Dolores Water Conservancy District
Laura Spann, Recorder, SWCD

1. Introductions

Mike Preston called the meeting to order and introductions were made. Special guest Russell George, Interbasin Compact Committee (IBCC) Director, was welcomed to the meeting and provided background on the evolution of the Roundtable process statewide.

2. CWCB Demand Management Workgroup Updates, Other Venues

Updates were provided from Southwestern Colorado participants in the CWCB Demand Management Workgroups. There was discussion regarding the balance between careful, paced consideration of demand management and making measurable progress in the feasibility investigation. Given CWCB staff changes, the holiday schedule, winter travel limitations, and the complexity of issues related to the proposed demand management program, the Workgroups have not progressed very far. Subcommittee members expressed varied opinions on what the pace should be for the demand management feasibility investigation.

John Currier reported that the River District was awarded a \$315,000 Reclamation WaterSMART grant to support Colorado River modeling, the Phase III Risk Study, the Water Bank Work Group secondary impacts study, and activities related to the demand management feasibility investigation.

State legislation has been introduced to create a public input process led by the legislature--similar to that conducted during development of the water plan—for the demand management feasibility investigation.

3. Evaluation of Drought Contingency Plan Tools (Exchange with Russell George)

Russell George participated in a discussion with Roundtable members on how the IBCC can assist with the process for evaluating demand management. Other measures identified in the Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) were also discussed, including phreatophyte removal and cloud seeding. While forest health is not specifically called out in the DCP, southwestern Colorado sees this as another potential tool for drought planning. At the October 2019 meeting, the Roundtable provided direction that these topics be discussed in parallel with demand management.

a. Demand Management (Potential for IBCC to Address Equitability)

Russell George summarized the last IBCC meeting, the focus of which was how proportionality could be satisfied in any proposed demand management program. Several questions were raised, and no clear answers identified.

b. Cloud Seeding (Efforts to Modernize SW Colorado Programs)

Ken Curtis summarized southwestern Colorado's weather modification (cloud seeding) efforts. Funders, including some from the Lower Basin, support modernization of the program. SWCD and DWCD are leading the push for installation of remote generators across the basins. SWCD has budgeted an additional \$27,000 for weather modification in 2020 to support half the cost of a new remote generator. CWCB will request additional weather modification funding from the legislature in the 2020 Projects Bills. Recently, a 2019 targeting study made several recommendations regarding improved seeding locations and potential verification tools to pursue. There was discussion regarding verification, quantification, and optimization of the cloud seeding program. Installation of permanent radar in southwestern Colorado, which would greatly assist with cloud seeding, is expected for spring 2021. Those interested in participating in more detail were invited to reach out to Ken Curtis or SWCD.

c. Phreatophyte Removal

Emily Kasyon, Southwest Conservation Corps, summarized current efforts by the Dolores River Restoration Partnership to remove tamarisk, Russian olive and other non-native species, conduct revegetation and monitoring, and continue planning and outreach along the Lower Dolores River. Amanda Kuenzi, Mountain Studies Institute, reported on phreatophyte removal in the Animas River basin, which has included remote sense mapping. John Currier mentioned a recent memo from the River District regarding the current state of science on phreatophyte removal and its impact on water supply, which are varied and context specific.

d. Forest & Watershed Health

Mike Preston reported that southwest Colorado has been chosen for a 10 year effort involving \$50 million in additional funding for expanded forest health and wildlife mitigation efforts on public and private land as part of the Rocky Mountain Restorative Initiative (RMRI). RMRI is a partnership between the US Forest Service and the National Wild Turkey Federation, along with 30 local collaborative organizations, business, and government agencies, and will direct to our region \$5 million dollars in annual spending per year over a 10-year period. That funding will be used to pay for prescribed burns, forest thinning and programs that support affordable and practical defensible space projects for residents and towns within the wild-urban interface (WUI) zone. There was discussion regarding the water supply impacts of various forest management strategies, the complexity and importance of watershed health to our communities and the Colorado River basin, how water quality is impacted by wildfire, and the value of understanding, improving and monitoring the health of southwest Colorado's forests.

e. Industrial Demand Management (Changing Power Plant Water Usage)

Ed Millard brought forward the concept that the water (172,000 af annually) that in the future will no longer utilized by the several coal-fired power plants could be temporarily used by the Upper Basin to fill its Lake Powell storage pool. The River District will coordinate with SWCD to explore this opportunity.

4. Reporting out to Roundtable

The subcommittee organized their summary for reporting to the Roundtable at the full meeting.