



Colorado River District

Protecting Western Colorado Water Since 1937

Colorado River District awards grants

The Colorado River District Board of Directors awarded nearly \$250,000 in financial assistance to 11 water projects at its April 19-20, 2011, regular quarterly meeting.

This is the second year that the Colorado River District has operated a unified program for large and small grants. The program received requests for more than \$1.39 million from 24 qualified applicants.

Awards are made on a cost-sharing basis.

Projects must meet one or more of these objectives: develop new water supplies; improve existing water supply projects; improve water use efficiency; improve sediment control; improve water quality; undertake a watershed action or implement tamarisk control.

This year's recipients represent a wide variety of water supply projects that meet the multiple objectives of the grant program and include:

Grand River Ditch Pipeline in Garfield County was awarded \$85,500 for concrete inlets and outlets, 1,460 feet of HDPE plastic pipe and 412 cubic yards of rock riprap.

The ditch serves 150 ditch users,

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The Colorado River District Board of Directors met with officials from Northern Water at its April 19-20, 2011, regular quarterly meeting. From left are Northern Water Assistant General Manager Don Carlson, Board of Directors President Mike Applegate and General Manager Eric Wilkinson.

Northern Water discusses projects with CRD Board

A delegation from the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District visited the Colorado River District Board meeting on April 19-20. Northern Water benefits from the Colorado-Big Thompson Project and is the managing entity for the Windy Gap Project. Both projects draw Colorado River water across the Continental Divide.

Visiting from Northern Water were General Manager Eric Wilkinson, Assistant General Man-

ager Don Carlson and Board of Directors President Mike Applegate.

The Windy Gap Firing Project is currently undergoing permitting. Elements of the project are also being negotiated with the Colorado River District.

Wilkinson said the project would firm up 30,000 acre feet of water of the 48,000 acre feet envisioned when the project was built in the 1980s.

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Board awards grants to 11 water projects

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Dolores River Restoration Tamarisk Removal/Riparian Restoration Project, headed by The Nature Conservancy, was awarded \$15,000 toward an ongoing tamarisk-control project in Mesa County along the Dolores River. In so doing, instream water quality will improve by decreasing the salinity levels. In addition, the riparian area for wildlife forage and shelter will contribute to the river's natural geomorphic process and improve water quality for aquatic life.

Gilmores Irrigation Water Project recently began burying its main pipes which has already decreased water loss and erosion and reduced salts from seeping into the Colorado River in Garfield County. The award of \$5,305 will assist in finishing this project with a gated-pipe system.

Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers will remove tamarisk around the Interstate 70 Rifle Rest Area in 2011. A broad coalition of partners will recruit 40 to 70 volunteers for this full-day project to significantly reduce this noxious and invasive plant. The group will be awarded \$10,400 to help with the project.

Bellio East Main Pipeline was awarded \$15,000 to improve exist-



Workmen unload pipe used to repair the East Mesa Ditch in Pitkin County. The Colorado River District awarded \$15,000 to the ditch company to assist with the repair of a washout in 2010.

ing water supply by replacement of outdated and inefficient flood irrigation pipeline. The new sprinkler system was designed by the National Resources Conservation Services and is located in Garfield County.

Red Mountain Ditch diverts water to the City of Ouray. The existing ditch currently loses about 0.5 percent of the transported water. The project includes construction of a grouted rock diversion structure and repair and installation of pipes. The grant is for \$22,500.

Restoration of the East Mesa Ditch that washed out in the fall of 2010. The repair required 4,500 yards of fill, 750 feet of pipe and two clean-outs and head walls. The ditch company, located in Pitkin County, was awarded a \$15,000 grant.

Ware & Hinds Culvert Replacement under Cactus Valley Ditch, in Garfield County, was awarded \$10,100 for replacement of 100 feet of culvert whose bottom has rusted out and collapsed.

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Grants

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The culvert is a critical element in the control, management and efficient use of pre-1922 Colorado River Compact water rights.

Lederhause East Field Sprinkler Installation in Routt County includes converting flood irrigation to a more efficient sprinkling system, reducing runoff containing silt and salts and improving wildlife habitat. The grant of \$15,500 will also improve water flow.

Richard Hanson's Irrigation System Extension Project in Garfield County will extend existing pipeline to provide sprinkler irrigation to portions previously watered by flood irrigation. Grant amount is for \$5,352.

Gunnison River Restoration Project in Delta County includes modifying a dam to allow for fish to pass, eliminating the last major fish blockage in the lower Gunnison River and significantly improving river health. Reconnecting river habitat will result in increased populations of three target fish species and should increase the general fish population. This work also insures that the Hartland Irrigation Co. maintains access to its senior pre-Colorado Compact water decree, improves navigational safety on the river and eliminates private property trespassing issues.

Northern meets with CRD to discuss water issues

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During operations, it was found the anticipated yield was not being met because of restrictions on junior water rights in dry times and lack of storage in wet years when rights were in priority.

The firming project is to build a new 90,000-acre-foot Chimney Hollow reservoir in Northern Colorado to store Windy Gap water.

Wilkinson said the Bureau of Reclamation is scheduled to release a final Environmental Impact Statement in summer 2011.

He also said negotiations continue with the River District and Grand County on mitigation enhancements. "I would like to think we are getting close," he said.

Another shared issue between the two entities is working out a permanent water supply to help support the Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery Program. West Slope water users and Front Range water users share an obligation for 10,825 acre feet to bolster habitat flows in the 15-Mile Reach at Grand Junction.

The West Slope half will come from Ruedi Reservoir and the

Front Range half will come from Granby Reservoir, thanks to efforts by Northern. Wilkinson said contracting challenges with the Bureau of Reclamation are clearing up. He hopes the water can start flowing in 2013.

CRD General Manager Eric Kuhn asked how Northern might employ Colorado-Big Thompson Project water to fill a planned reservoir near Fort Collins that would be part of Northern Water's Northern Integrated Supply Project (NISP) in the Poudre River Basin.

Wilkinson said that NISP participants might use CBT rental water to help with the first fill of Glade Reservoir. The tactic would be limited to Glade's initial fill only.

Wilkinson said NISP is in a supplemental draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) phase and he hopes it moves into the final EIS phase in 2012.

"It is very much needed by the 15 participants of the project," Wilkinson said, noting that the population of the area is expected to double. "Some are already short of water. We need to move forward to get this project done," he said.



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DNR chief, Board discuss challenges

Colorado Department of Natural Resources Director Mike King met with Colorado River District Board members along with Alex Davis, the DNR Assistant Director for Water.

King said that budget cutting issues are dominating state government and DNR is trying to protect what is most important and rebuild when state finances improve. He also pledged the DNR's support for working out the state's role in implementing the proposed Colorado River Cooperative Agreement between 34 West Slope entities and Denver Water.

One of the complex issues in the proposal is settling exactly how the state will administer the fill of Green Mountain Reservoir.

"We understand how monumental this agreement is, how important it is. We want to make it work," Davis said.

Board members questioned why the State Engineer's Office, which is supposed to administer court-approved water rights, is so heavily involved legally in



Colorado Department of Natural Resources Director Mike King and Assistant Director for Water Alex Davis address the Colorado River District Board.

water rights cases, often being the only intervener. "Currently the SEO hammers points in law rather than helping resolve cases," Board Member Andy Mueller said.

King said the DNR is discussing its policies.

Board OKs Wild & Scenic alternative management plan

A Wild and Scenic Management Plan for the Colorado River in Grand and Eagle Counties was endorsed by the Colorado River District Board of Directors. The Management Plan was hammered out by stakeholders as a means of preserving the outstanding remarkable values of the river without going to a full federal Wild and Scenic designation that would be inflexible about river operations.

"This is very much a consensus-

driven, cooperative, volunteer-based plan," said General Counsel Peter Fleming, the Colorado River District's lead in negotiating the plan. "It doesn't do everything for the resource that we might hope for, but it can do things through cooperative measures that we don't think the resource would get through federal oversight."

Fleming said that a governance committee will be set up to review river issues and try to reach consen-

sus. He said that if consensus fails, "as a last-ditch measure" stakeholders can terminate the management plan and then the Bureau of Land Management would have to decide how to manage the river and determine if it is suitable or not for full federal Wild and Scenic designation.

The 70-page plan can be viewed at http://www.crwcd.org/page_309. The plan includes an executive summary that encapsulates the issues.

Board acts to abandon West Divide rights

The Colorado River District holds a portfolio of conditional water rights that represent future water development. Every six years, the District goes to water court to file “diligence,” proof that work continues on bringing projects to fruition at some future date.

Conditional water rights are important in the Prior Appropriation System. They provide a placeholder in the priority list for projects that take a long time to mature. The date a conditional water right carries is the date it would have in priority when it goes on line.

At times, the District decides to relinquish conditional water rights that no longer are deemed realistic or financially feasible. At its April 19-20, 2011, meeting, the Board voted to relinquish a number of rights and to continue diligence on others. The most significant project in the mix was the historic West Divide Project. The Colorado River District detailed its actions in the following press release:

The Colorado River District Board of Directors voted April 19, 2011, to abandon – or relinquish -- most of the Crystal River conditional water rights associated with the West Divide Project, a water development project envisioned in the 1960s that would have moved water from the Crystal River to the West Divide area south of the Colo-

rado River for irrigation and oil shale development.

The limited rights that the Colorado River District seeks to retain will change the focus of the project from one that would have benefited the Colorado River Valley to one focused on potentially helping the Crystal River drainage with late-season flows and create the potential for hydropower development.

The West Divide Project also contained many components located in the West Divide area.

These water rights will be maintained to benefit the original West Divide service area, but using in-basin water supplies.

All the rights in question that were subject to a vote are held on behalf of the West Divide Water Conservancy District, which would be the sponsoring entity if there was to be a federal Bureau of Reclamation project.

Crystal River components of the original water rights included two large reservoirs on the Crystal River, the 128,728.27 acre-foot Osgood Reservoir which would have inundated the village of Redstone and the 58,009 acre-foot Placita Reservoir farther upstream. Under today’s Colorado River District Board direction, water rights to Osgood Reservoir will be abandoned completely. At the same time, the River District will seek to maintain

conditional rights for a small, 4,000 acre-foot Placita Reservoir that could in the future help with in-basin, low-flow issues in the Crystal River in late summer.

The West Divide Project water rights faced a diligence filing on May 31. The Colorado River District decisions were made in concurrence with the West Divide Board.

The original West Divide Project was approved by Congress in 1966 as part of the historic Colorado River Storage Project Act that led to the construction of the Animas-LaPlata Project and Ridgway Reservoir, among others.

But the Bureau of Reclamation subsequently judged the West Divide project unfeasible on a cost-benefit basis, and it was never granted federal funds.

Despite the promise of federal funding, the Colorado River District reconfigured the project and its water rights over the years in anticipation that one day it could be valuable to the Crystal, Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys.

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How to contact us

For more information about the Colorado River District or board actions, call Jim Pokrandt at (970) 945-8522 x 236 or e-mail edinfo@crwcd.org. Visit www.ColoradoRiverDistrict.org.

Board takes action on conditional water rights

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The Colorado River District filed for the project's original water rights in 1957. They were adjudicated by the water court in 1958 and 1965, dating to a River District era where one of its main roles was to file water rights that would later become Reclamation projects and to help create water conservancy districts to be beneficiaries of those projects.

Two large dam sites were originally decreed on the Crystal River: Osgood and Placita. Most likely, only one would have ever been built. Each was associated with an alternate route to deliver water to the West Divide mesa and areas in western Garfield County.

From Osgood, a canal system was to deliver water down the Crystal and Roaring Fork River valleys then through a tunnel to the West Divide area. From Placita, a series

of tunnels and canals would have conveyed water to the west side of McClure Pass into the Muddy Creek drainage in the Gunnison basin and then tunnelled to the West Divide area. But only the conveyance elements for Osgood were ever decreed.

Here is what the River District Board approved:

- Abandon the 128,728.27 acre-foot Osgood Reservoir
- Abandon the 1,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) Osgood Power Plant
- Abandon the 830 cfs Four-mile Canal and Siphon diversion point on the Crystal River
- Reduce the 62,009 acre-foot Placita Reservoir to 4,000 acre feet
- Reduce the 1,000 cfs Placita Power Plant to 150 cfs
- Reduce the 1,000 cfs Ava-

lanche Canal and Siphon to 250 cfs

- Reduce the 13,695 acre-foot Yank Creek Reservoir to 5,000 acre feet
- Maintain the 85 cfs Four-mile Canal associated with Yank Creek Reservoir
- Reduce the Fourmile Creek diversion to the Fourmile Canal and Siphon to 50 cfs
- Reduce the 200 cfs Threemile Creek Diversion to Fourmile Canal and Siphon to 50 cfs

The Board also acted to relinquish or modify rights on a number of other projects, including the Flattops Project, the Rangely Project, the Red Cliff Project and the Basalt Project. For more information, contact Jim Pokrandt at (970) 945-8522 x 236 or email jpokrandt@crwcd.org.

The Colorado River District Mission Statement:

To lead in the protection, conservation, use and development of the water resources of the Colorado River Basin for the welfare of the District, and to safeguard for Colorado all waters of the Colorado River to which it is entitled.

Board receives a clean financial audit

The Colorado River District Board of Directors was told at its April 2011 meeting that it had received an "unqualified or clean opinion" as part of an audit of its 2010 finances. This is the highest level audit that can be earned. Every year, the Colorado River District undergoes a financial audit. The 2010 audit was performed by Kevin Smith of McGladrey & Pullen LLP of Iowa. The complete 51-page report can be found at http://www.crwcd.org/page_220.

Board hears state, federal affairs report

Chris Treese, Manager for External Affairs, briefed the Board on remaining state legislative activities of interest, just prior to the General Assembly's May 11 adjournment.

The Board reaffirmed its opposition to state efforts to balance the general fund budget by transferring funds from the dedicated water-development funds.

Treese noted that although the annual budget bill and related enabling legislation were moving through the process, opposition to such transfers sends an important message and is consistent with the River District's historical position on cash-fund transfers. Accordingly, the Board adopted a position in opposition to a section of Senate Bill 226.

In recognition of the progress made in on-going negotiations regarding House Bill 1115, which would have dictated numerous requirements in public construction contracts, the Board changed its position from opposing to monitoring the bill. The amendments had successfully removed the most offensive and intrusive requirements of the bill, and the Board felt good-faith negotiating required it to remove its opposition.

Treese then related that a joint legislative committee failed in its charge to create a consensus recommendation for Congressional redistricting.

Instead, Republicans and Democrats proffered multiple, sharply contrasting proposals. Notably, Democratic maps divided the West Slope in half just south of Interstate 70. After a lengthy discussion, directors unanimously adopted the following position: "The River District believes watersheds are a critical "community of interest" consideration as the Colorado General Assembly redistricts Congressional boundaries. Accordingly, the River District Board adopts a position that the West Slope should be kept whole to the maximum extent possible."

Federal Affairs:

Treese also briefed the Board on federal matters of interest to the water community. He noted that federal agencies will continue to operate throughout the remainder of the current fiscal year (through September 30) without a current-year budget. A "continuing resolution" based on the 2009 budgets will be the basis for federal funding and priorities, leaving considerable confusion among agency staffs.

Meanwhile, oversight hearings have begun on the President's 2012 budget with intense partisan negotiations and posturing in full swing on the size and structure of future budgets. The Bureau of Reclamation (BLM), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other water-related agencies are expected to ex-

perience significant cuts, at least in the House version of budget bills.

A bill to avoid duplicative EPA permitting requirements for farmers and ranchers who apply certain pesticides passed the House of Representatives with a bi-partisan super majority. The River District Board previously voted to support this bill. Treese reported that the bill is expected to have a tougher time in the Senate.

Treese also reported that the River District will be coordinating legislation to fulfill one of the recommendations coming out of the Wild & Scenic report to the Grand Junction BLM office. This legislation would modify Black Ridge Wilderness boundaries, remove the Colorado River through McInnis Canyons from Wild & Scenic consideration and return to multiple-use management Wilderness Studies Areas adjacent to the Dominguez Wilderness area.

Finally, with the concurrence of Congressional leaders, the River District will not pursue legislation to make permanent a contract with the Bureau of Reclamation for 5,412.5 acre feet of Ruedi Reservoir water to fulfill the West Slope's obligation to endangered fish species under the 15 Mile Reach Programmatic Biological Opinion. Such legislation will be advanced once the contract has been executed, likely to occur in 2012.



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Proctor honored

Colorado River District Board President Tom Sharp saluted Dick Proctor of Mesa County for his Board service. Proctor recently elected not to seek reappointment after three terms. Proctor is Manager of the Grand Valley Water Users Association.



Redifer commended

At left, CRD General Manager Eric Kuhn presents a commemorative map to John Redifer of Grand Junction, who decided to end his reign as the Colorado River Basin representative to the Colorado Water Conservation Board. At top, Redifer confers with his replacement, Russ George of Rifle.