

# **DRAFT MINUTES**

## **Lower Gunnison Basin Selenium Management Program**

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DATE: Monday, August 25, 2014

Time: 11:00 am to 3:30 pm

Location: North Spruce Conference Room, Forest Service Office, 2250 Hwy 50, Delta, Colorado

Conference Call Line: 1-866-541-2318

Attendees: Theresa McGovern (NRCS), Francine Lheritier (NRCS), Gabe Lucero (NRCS), Suzanne Paschke (USGS), Paul Kehmeir (Ag Producer), Dave Brown (USGS), Allen Distal (Bostwick Park Water Conservancy District), John Sottolare (Reclamation), Terry Stroh (Reclamation), Jenny Ward (Reclamation), Dave Kanzer (Co River District), Ken Leib (USGS), Barb Osmundson (FWS), Mike Baker (Self), Steve Miller (CWCB), Sonja Chavez de Baca (STF), Dave Dearstyne (NRCS), Tom Kay (DCD), Jim Currier (CSCB), and Todd Ohlheiser.

I. Introductions and discussion of agenda (11:00 am)

II. General Updates (11:10 am -12:10 pm)

a. **Salinity Program 2010-2012 Projects (Reclamation).**

-**Siphon lateral (Bostwick):** Doing their wetland mitigation in the Billy Creek State Wildlife Area and hope to start construction this fall.

-**Forked Tongue:** Working on NEPA, no design yet. Hope finalize design and go to bid this fall.

-**Crawford Clipper:** Plan to begin construction this fall.

-**Rogers Mesa (Slack & Patterson Lats):** Plan to begin construction this fall.

-**Minnesota Upper Ditch:** Mostly complete.

- **Minnesota Extension Ditch:** Plan to begin construction this fall.

-**Cattleman's:** Hope to start construction winter/spring 2015.

-**C ditch:** Mostly complete.

-**Stewart:** Complete winter 2014/15

-**Uncompahgre Project:** Plan to begin construction spring/summer 2015.

Total of 8 projects awarded in Colorado during 2012 FOA (3 Basin State) and (5 Basinwide, which includes 1 in the Grand Valley).

Expecting 2015 FOA to open during May or June of 2015.

Reclamation will likely have listening sessions in the late winter/early spring before the FOA announcement. During the latter part of spring or in the summer they plan to have work sessions.

DK suggested that we need to try to do more education and outreach prior to the FOA, especially in the area near Colona. Selenium concerns in this area.

Steve – CWCB grant program targeting private/non-federal companies for engineering help/FOA design. Hoping to get \$250K approved (minimum 150). Capped at \$3k-\$5 for each entity depending on size. Has to do competitive process. Hope to get \$ in people's hands by late November/early December. DK wants to provide help target.

CWCB Grants – planning grants for ditch consolidation. Follow-up steps would be for those who decide to move forward, they can get eng/design assistance for FOA 15.

Terry asked if we can have a bullet summary of potential grant support so that we can help spread the word.

**b. Critical Conservation Area Designation & RCPP Application – Colorado River (CRWCD).**

There are five principal areas in the Lower Gunnison Basin where we're trying to leverage RCPP funding. Asked to submit a full proposal by Oct 2, 2014.

Identified broad category of high priority action items in the SMP that fall under agricultural water efficiency improvements. Hope to invest up to \$40M. We can target partially funded selenium rich areas. Other monitoring and implementation activities can match as grant requires 50% match (ie. 1:1). Pre-proposal is available from DK for anyone who wants a copy.

NRCS has identified soil health practices – some of these unfunded. Targeting EQIP (10-20%) and Watershed & Flood Protection authority (80%). A lot of farmers are very interested in on-farm improvements with off-farm conveyance system improvements (adv tech, applic, soil moisture – anything that reduces deep perc). The group is looking into the possibility of using MOA, SCTF, and Salinity money as a source of matching funds. Also identified GBIP projects as potential area to work for projects.

Steve Miller –WQCD opted to not include NPS funds as potential match to RCPP. STF/CRWCD can lobby for this.

Steve put in request to have \$500K to contribute to RCPP project in Colorado (available July 1 2015 therefore FY16 funds).

DK talking to CWCB to discuss present RCPP. He is also taking the opportunity to discuss/present the RCPP proposal to the finance committee that meets on the Weds before the board meeting.

**c. Salinity Program Items**

**Salinity Program Field Coordinator Position (Reclamation)** Sent recommendation to salinity workgroup for position and it was approved. Monies will soon be in place to hire somebody. Don't yet have details on who, where. State taking the lead (Cindy Lair, DK, Steve) to come up with process to hire person to maximize "salinity" control. Looking at \$100K/year for two years, renewable after that if it works. It would be appropriate to have this person understand/coordinate what we're doing in selenium program to help leverage salinity funds. Jim Currier felt that they could meet soon to get the job description put together.

**NRCS Staff:** Additional staff in NRCS office to help with processing applications (Separate from salinity coordinator position). Theresa – they are attempting to fill Delta position. New state conservationist is expected this fall.

For this year's signup EQIP the deadline is Aug 29<sup>th</sup>. They are now in the obligation phase – getting signatures for approved applications. They had a lot of large contracts that were funded this year.

Steve asked the workgroup to look at how NRCS calculates salt loading within the Lower Gunnison Basin and see if that method could be changed. Currently, loading is calculated by applying an average salt loading value across the Basin, as compared to assigning varying degrees of loading for each sub-basin. By averaging the salt loading numbers the Lower Gunnison Basin may be at a disadvantage when competing for Basin State funding, especially against the Grand Valley, and the SMP group should have an interest in this. For the RCPP, we have to use the current NRCS salt ranking method unless we can change the ranking to consider selenium.

**d. STF items (Sonja)**

Worked with DK on the development of the RCPP pre-application in support of its benefits to water quality and endangered species. Also Incorporated SMP Action Plan items that may fit into the overall project goals.

Worked with the facilitation/coordination of the Science Team

Performed oversight of the big gun on-farm project implementation project

Presently working with the WQCD on promoting future selenium control projects (bonie – on-farm tour, phase 9 piping, etc.)

Water Quality Monitoring Program (July field day). Will be working on new sampling schedule coordination between USGS, WQCD, STF

Moving our office, and hiring a new employee.

**III. Technical Team Updates (12:10-12:20 pm)**

Still short an NRCS member (hoping to get Todd involved – new Jason Peel).

The Technical Team is interested in looking again at surge irrigation (two local, published documents are on surge irrigation). In previous studies, surge had mixed results, so the team will look at it again to see if it would be worth pursuing, especially in light of the new electronic technology that's available. Dave Brown said that they could present info they prepared for the Salinity Control Forum on surge to the Technical Team. Paul Kehmeir suggested that surge could be something we could do to improve the existing predominant type of irrigation systems in Delta County, which is gated pipe. Much of Delta County is not suited to sprinkler, so gated pipe is widely adopted by the farmers. Steve felt he hoped that this is one of the things that could be looked at by the person in the new Salinity Coordinator position.

**IV. Education and Outreach Updates (12:20--12:30 pm)**

Alecia will look at potential work session meeting dates in late October and November.

The team will be working on an education and outreach proposal to the NPS Program for \$5K in support of needed RCPP outreach, coordination of on- and off-farm activities, etc.

Alecia will be working on scheduling a meeting of the committee for early October.

Discussion is taking place concerning the selenium symposium again for the state of Colorado and other nearby states.

**V. OTHER INTERESTED PARTY INPUT:**

Allen Distel: Cimmaron Drainage is outside salinity control unit, but stated that he may have significant salt. For areas outside of established salinity basins, Reclamation may be able to use sparrow model for deriving salt load numbers. Interested entities can write letter of request and interest to Reclamation asking them to gather data and derive number for a particular basin. Reclamation will send information to Allen to help him put in a request.

The area has probably had a lot of selenium (and possibly salts) already flushed out due to elevation and precipitation. Dave also said NRCS went out and discussed issues with the highway Department concerning areas that are impacted by canal seepage. CDOT may have an interest in addressing this since it may be less expensive to line the canal than it would be to repair ongoing highway damage caused by seepage.

**VI. Lunch (12:30–1:30 pm)**

SCTF: There is increased scrutiny to put measurables/deliverables into the funding agreements. We need to show performance – may take a little more from fiscal agents to document results.

Reclamation: Things currently funding and supporting (**get Terry to put in summary here – missed**)

Field Services Program Grant – Ryan Christiansen.

MOA CRSP Discussion –

USGS Co-Op Funding for Se Mgt  
Coop Water Program – up to 50% match

Regional ground water monitoring  
Science plan  
Groundwater monitoring  
Wetland study  
Phase II geochemical characterization  
Statistical modeling  
Biology work  
USGS \$560,000 over 4 years (2012-2015)

Combining systems – could be more bang for the buck but takes advanced planning.

Need to look at other things like education and outreach as well as land use regulation changes to have an impact on selenium loading.

## VII. Science/Research Team Updates (1:30-2:45 pm)

- a. Soil Core & Column Study (Phase 1 and 2) (Alisa) – Phase I complete (S&T funding 2012-13, published in Applied Geochem Journal. Technical bulletin from study goes out to all water managers, etc. and directs people to publication and implications.  
  
Phase II funded by SCTF & USGS Coop Water Program (FY14-15). Bulk of work done next year. Alisa obtaining materials from cores and from NRCS (Dave Dearstyne).
- b. Soil Survey Collaborative Research (NRCS) Updating Paonia Soil Survey. Paonia does not have separation between irrigated and non-irrigated.
- c. National Selenium Soil Interpretation (NRCS) – Have two years of data from the mapping/study. Looking at 3<sup>rd</sup> year for refining areas where we have highest members (e.g. Smoky Hill Member). Indicators are that there is more selenium in some members than other. Idea gets maps of soils and then correlate rates of release. Reviewing data set priority, but not gathering new data. Meeting scheduled for the last week of Sept. 29<sup>th</sup> (Alisa supposed to present also).  
  
Dave D. – indicated that rate of release is critical in terms of knowing the impact of non-ag sources of selenium loading.
- d. On-farm research (Big Gun Demo Site & Other) – Randy received official notice from NRCS that his EQIP application and funding were approved. Hopes to put in the pond this fall and the guns later winter/early spring. Planning for incorporating some field day.
- e. GW monitoring well installation status (USGS)  
  
30 well random design installed. 10 of the wells monitored during non-irrigation season and 30 recently samples. Sampling- major ions, selenium - speciation, age dating - tritium, understanding sources of recharge, DOC, isotopes – hydrogen, oxygen (rain or snowmelt). Will also probably look at the fact that potable treated water sources could be contributing selenium load from subdivisions/development.

Science Team also discussed monitoring of groundwater levels – Ken is going to talk with Steve Anders before USGS-CRWCD meeting on Sept 30<sup>th</sup> concerning the use of transducers which log data, and are self-powered. Need to figure out costs. USGS may be able to rent the equipment from their Hydrologic Instrumentation Facility. Perry says it may be also be a fairly reasonable price to purchase. Only need to go out every few months to download data, measure water level, and adjust calibration if necessary. Maybe somebody like Alecia could be trained to do this. Does the agreement limit the access? Ken doesn't think so. Anyone going in is required to contact land owner ahead of time. Science Team can discuss details – action item.

f. Other:

Soils: Francine said that she could help with national soil interpretation when Dave retires. If we need/want other soil support, we need to propose and Francine can take it up the chain of command.

VIII. **Science Plan (2:45-3:15 pm)(USGS) The document can be accessed at the following link: [http://www.seleniumtaskforce.org/images/Se\\_SciencePlan\\_06302014\\_Version1.pdf](http://www.seleniumtaskforce.org/images/Se_SciencePlan_06302014_Version1.pdf)**

a. Discussion and vote on adoption of Science Plan

Well supported by Science Team and recommended for approval.

Importance of keeping track of changes/documented via amendment fashion. Reclamation would be the keeper of the document, as well as the amendments, and keep track of recommended changes which would be incorporated into the Science Plan every 3 years.

Transmitting/sharing the document with the Recovery Program: The Science Plan is based upon the best available information. We should encourage them to look at when they're doing their reporting. Part of the ROD for the Aspinall EIS.

Science Plan accepted by consensus subject to editorial changes that Suzanne is making and that it will be amended on an annual basis.

IX. **Other Items (3:15-3:30 pm)**

**a. Discussion of funding (Terry)**

Don't have any notes on this...

b. Perspective from Irrigators

Paul could help with talking to landowners about watershed health, interest in FOA and NRCS EQIP program. There is interest and a deep held suspicion regarding federal government involvement in private landowners. Main feeling that he's getting is proposing the concept and getting to the point of actually getting to the application phase is more on the timeframe of years rather than weeks or months. People need time to come around to the idea of piping ditches, dealing with invasive species and selenium issues, changing to more efficient practices and limited grazing in riparian areas.

Paul knows of about 3 ditches that would qualify for FOA. None of the three will likely apply due to impediments. General anecdotal information regarding these impediments:

- 1) Incorporating the ditches – a challenge (have to be incorporated to contract with the govt. There's a lot already incorporated.) Some landowners don't want formalities of bylaws, mtgs, assessments, landowners not getting along, liability concerns with regard to safety, lack of enthusiasm in working with govt and suspicion of hidden agendas.

- 2) Best candidates for salinity funding are going to be those that have drive and is willing to be persistent. Coordinator shouldn't present idea of "would you do us a favor and apply for funding"

It would help to have someone to advise the applicant. The hardest hurdles are incorporating, hiring an engineer, and knowing whether or not they will be responsible for taxes. Need to have someone/landowner watching engineers regarding the specifics of the ditch.

"Someone who's been a local applicant is going to have more repoire than one person trying to cover the entire area". See's it more as a seasonal job when farmers are not busy in the winter.

Unincorporated ditches are the ones with 2-3 landowners. Best place to start are those that are incorporated.

**X. Next SMP Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, October 22, 2014**