

**Groundwater Management Districts Association
2022 Summer Meeting Notes
Copper Mountain, Colorado
Dick Ehrman**

I attended the Summer meeting of GMDA at the Copper Mountain resort in Colorado. States present were Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico. NRDs represented were Lower Platte South, Lower Platte North, Lower Loup, Central Platte, Lower Big Blue (new members!), Upper Big Blue, and Little Blue. Following is a bulleted list of the highlights of the conference.

Tuesday, June 21

Welcome—Randy Ray, Central Colorado Water Conservancy District

Board Meeting Report from January 2022 meeting—Dick Ehrman, GMDA Secretary-Treasurer

- The role of GMDA is expanding as groundwater issues increase in the west and all across the US
- Accordingly, GMDA must reach out to new members and states not yet represented
- Such outreach will likely require an increase in dues as they have not increased since 2008

Welcome to Copper Mountain—Nance Levin/Dave Steel

- A very interesting overview of how the resort operates!
- There are 150 volunteers who take care of Copper Mountain guests (Ambassadors)
- Copper Mountain opened in 1972 (same year the NRDs started operation!); 2022 is 25th year of Ambassadors program
- Copper Mountain is on federal forest service land so environmental assessment was necessary; any new work has to be approved by Forest Service
- Historically served by four wells but two of them involved groundwater under the direct influence of surface water (GWUDI); planning underway for well five; roughly 125' deep
- Snowmaking & golf course watering comes from non-potable surface water

East Troublesome Fire Recovery Efforts—Kimberly Mihelich, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (Northern Water)

- Northern Water manages diversion of west slope water to east slope for domestic & ag use—Granby etc. Reservoirs through Adams Tunnel; these diversions also produce hydropower
- 615,000 irrigated acres served
- East Troublesome Fire was second largest fire in CO in 2020; occurred mostly west of Continental Divide north of Lake Granby; 100,000 A burned (mostly Forest Service land)
- Postfire impacts—sedimentation, debris flows, harmful algal blooms, water treatment impacts, flash floods
- Recovery efforts requiring partnerships w/ many entities—national parks, Colorado DOT, USGS, towns (40+ agencies)
- NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program—500+ landowners contacted, about 250 ended up participating; 5,000 acres mulched at a cost of \$18M federal & \$4M state
- Regular public contact—town halls, fact sheets, website, etc.

- Increased water quality monitoring—greater frequency, additional parameters, real-time collection (USGS agreement for \$330K total)
- Upstream land management agreement w/ USFS for \$7.8 M

Cameron Peak Fire Recovery—Shayna Jones, Coalition for the Poudre River Watershed/Sean Chambers, City of Greeley

- Coalition (CPRW) consists of 20 entities in northern Colorado for Poudre Watershed
- Focus areas: Forests & Fires, River Restoration, Watershed Resilience, & Post-Fire Restoration
- Poudre River watershed is larger than Delaware!
- Cameron Peak Fire—August 2020; by early September 78,000 A; by October 19 reached 200,000; Contained in December after burning 208,000 A (largest in Colorado history)
- Water resources impacts—reservoir storage operations, snowpack & runoff timing, water quality, & water availability for municipal uses
- 10-25X more sediment going into reservoirs as compared to historical amounts
- Treatment of “normal” water typically at 10-500 NTUs; water coming in after fire was in the 1000s due to ash and sediment

Nebraska Caucus Lunch Meeting:

Priorities:

- Dues structure: agreed that \$700-\$1,000 is appropriate
- GMDA Future: NWRA gives good service for the dues GMDA pays but we need to reach out to grow GMDA’s membership.
- Website: So far, website has been managed by volunteers. Need to consider if an internet service is necessary
- Outreach to other States: Continue to have meetings in states that aren’t members. Also see if States have some sort of “water roundtable” or similar meetings to get GMDA information in front of them.

South Platte Alluvial Wells—Brad Grasmick, Lawrence Custer Grasmick Jones & Donovan LLP

- South Platte aquifer began being used in 1950s mainly as a guard against drought w/ encouragement from State
- Colorado is a prior appropriation state for surface water (like Nebraska); conflicts between groundwater and surface water led to integration of groundwater into surface water system in 1969
- Moyer v Empire Lodge—court case between neighbors involving filling ponds out of priority
- Failure of State Engineer’s rules led to augmentation plans necessary for South Platte basin; individual farmers had to pay several thousand dollars to be part of these plans—if not, some wells were curtailed
- Nebraska’s proposal to build canal is unclear in what effect it might have on the augmentation plans as well as the future of the South Platte

Augmentation Plans and Accounting--Billy Mihelich, Central Colorado Water Conservancy District (CCWCD)

- Brief history of CCWCD; 750 sq mi; 1,300 wells irrigating 220,000 A for 81,000 AF
- Augmentation plans must demonstrate replacement for stream flow & supplies must be greater than future depletions

- Recharge efforts—40+ alluvial recharge sites averaging 5,000 to 10,000 AF/year; accretions average 16,000 AF in projection
- CO water supply gap estimated in 2018 to be 500,000 AF+/year, w/ largest gap in northern Front Range

GMDA Board Meeting

- The draft minutes for the GMDA Board meeting can be found on the GMDA website at www.gmdausa.org.

Wednesday, June 22, 2022

GMDA Board Meeting Report—Dick Ehrman, GMDA Secretary-Treasurer

- I gave a brief summary of the Board meeting as described in the minutes; notable items include:
 - Ideas for outreach to new states/members
 - Changes to dues structure—generally, increases were in the 40-50% range for most membership categories
 - Upcoming meetings:
 - January 2023—Mississippi is organizing; likely to be in Virginia or the Carolinas
 - Summer 2023—New Mexico is organizing; no location yet but will likely concentrate on areas we haven't reached out to before

South Platte River Restoration—Jeff Shoemaker & Ryan Aids, Greenway Foundation

- This was a fascinating presentation regarding reclamation and restoration of the South Platte watershed within Denver!
- 1965 flood caused massive destruction in Denver; prior to that the South Platte had been dumping ground for asphalt, dirt, cement, etc. as “bank stabilization”
- Greenway Foundation was founded in 1974 as a result of the flood
- Overview of the development of Shoemaker Plaza, Grant Frontier Park, & other parks
- Currently doing variety of environmental education with elementary, middle school, & high school students as well as community outreach
- The contrast between what the South Platte looked like in the 1960s with what it looks like today (and is likely to look like in the future) was nothing short of amazing!

Issues on the Colorado River—Amy Ost diek, Colorado Water Conservation Board

- Colorado Water Conservation Board is responsible for water policy in Colorado
- Review of general aspects of interstate compacts; 2022 is 100th anniversary of Colorado River Compact
- 40 M people depend on Colorado River for water supply
- Compact defines system as mainstem and all tributaries
- Compact is governed by at least 9 laws/requirements/agreements passed between 1922 and 2019
- 2007 Interim Guidelines coordinate operations of Lakes Powell & Mead & recognize shortages in the lower basin due to extremely dry conditions, recognizing that lower basin users were still overusing
- 2019 Drought Contingency Plans involves interstate planning to reduce risks associated with reaching critical reservoir elevations—especially w/ regard to threats to hydropower

- Lower basin uses (especially in California) have actually increased in past 3 years!! This of course is of GREAT concern to Colorado
- Future work will be focused on altering the operations in Lake Powell and Lake Mead and avoiding curtailment in the Upper Basin

Denver Water's Collection System, Diversions, Storage, and Transmission—Nathan Elder, Denver Water

- A good overview of where Denver gets its water and how it's managed
- Established in 1918 & serves 1.5 million people (25% of CO population)
- Water supply exclusively from snowmelt; not currently pumping any groundwater although they do have rights (this was a surprise to me as I thought surely Denver got SOME of their supply from groundwater)
- Total watershed supplying Denver is about 4,000 sq mi (2.5 M A); roughly 50% in South Platte basin
- Description of the various reservoirs serving Denver Water
- Transbasin diversion through tunnels is amazing—the Roberts Tunnel is 23.3 miles long and can discharge 790 cfs!
- Denver Water instituted a recycled water program in 2007; water is used for irrigation and some commercial/industrial uses
- Expanding some reservoirs by raising dams to increase storage capacity
- Implementing an Aquifer Storage & Recovery (ASR) program; estimated to be able to store 15,000 AF

Recruiting GMDA Member Districts--Steve Walthour, GMDA President

- Recap of some of the discussion from Board meeting
- Increased outreach to non-member states is critical
- Implementing surveys to evaluate conferences & member needs
- Exchange of ideas w/ emphasis on modern media

Field Trip—Dillon Reservoir

- This was a tour of Dillon Reservoir, one of the reservoirs serving Denver Water. Unfortunately, the tour was limited to 20 participants and I was too late to sign up!

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to attend GMDA meetings, and am happy to serve both as Secretary-Treasurer and a Board member. Nebraska is of course a leader in the field of local groundwater management due to our NRD structure so we can provide a lot of good advice to other states, but I never fail to learn a lot of useful information at these meetings and by interacting with people from other states. Thanks again!

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
REPORT TO THE
LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT
July 20, 2022**

PERSONNEL:

- USDA Service Center Operations – The Lancaster and Cass County Service Centers are now open to walk-in customers. ***It's business as usual at NRCS!***
- Samantha Ziph has been hired as the new Soil Conservationist in the Weeping Water field office. Samantha graduated from Missouri State University with a B.S. in Natural Resources and minors in GIS and Agronomy. She has participated in the NRCS Pathways Intern Program and has served as the Soil Conservationist in the Miller, South Dakota field office. Welcome to Nebraska Samantha!

NRD LAND TREATMENT:

- Staff had a very successful FY22 implementing conservation practices through LPSNRD conservation programs. The following cost-shared projects were completed in FY22:
 - Soil & Water Conservation (District-wide)
 - 54 projects have been completed for a total of \$739,092
 - Soil & Water Conservation (Targeted)
 - 13 projects have been completed for a total of \$149,815
 - 46 cover crop seedings have been completed for a total of \$98,185

USDA PROGRAMS:

- EQIP – Staff has finished obligating FY22 contracts. The following contracts have been obligated:
 - Cass County - 8 contracts - \$381,765 – 1,344.8 acres
 - Lancaster County – 6 contracts - \$94,738 – 214.2 acres
- CRP – Staff is busy wrapping up General CRP contracts prior to the July 29th deadline for completion. The following number of contracts were accepted:
 - Lancaster County – 30 contracts
 - Cass County – 3 contracts

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Area 6 Range Judging Contest – Spring Creek Prairie – September 14th

Cory Schmidt - District Conservationist