

**DOLORES RIVER DIALOGUE
STEERING COMMITTEE**

Jan. 7, 2014

draft – 6 pages

Present: Don Schwindt, Dolores Water Conservancy District; Greg Black, Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company; Phyllis Snyder, San Juan Basin Farm Bureau; Drew Gordanier, Southwestern Colorado Livestock Association; Amber Kelley, San Juan Citizens Alliance; Peter Mueller, The Nature Conservancy; Lee-Ann Hill, Dolores River Boating Advocates. Contract staff: Marsha Porter-Norton, facilitator; Gail Binkly, recorder.

Agenda: The agenda was approved with no changes.

DRD 2014 and 2015 funding picture: The DRD-SC discussed a budget spreadsheet that had been prepared by Don and a revised two-year budget prepared by Marsha. She said grant applications to the Southwestern Water Conservation District are due on Jan. 17, so some key questions need to be answered.

Don said his calculations show that it takes approximately \$16,000 a year to operate the DRD, not taking into the account the current deficit left over from the 319 watershed plan. Going into 2014, he said, there is a negative balance of \$16,991. Don said this is not a huge concern because the DWCD board is generally amenable to carrying a deficit for the DRD if it is a temporary situation.

Don said this budget is extremely bare-bones and there may be a need for additional monies. He said in 2009 the DRD Steering Committee held a retreat and decided it needed not only a facilitator and recorder at its meetings, but contract-staff time for behind-the-scenes work. However, this proposed budget provides no money for Marsha to do any work beyond the meetings, such as brainstorming or researching. He said it's possible in the next two years that the DRD could incur expenses beyond what is in the proposed budget as the Implementation Plan and proposed NCA legislation are completed – depending on how involved the DRD and DRD-SC are in bringing those to the community.

Don said his goal is for the DRD to reach a zero balance or even a positive balance by the end of 2015. He thinks this can be accomplished with a realistic budget and contributions from core contributors.

Marsha said the Lower Dolores Working Group and Legislative Subcommittee are already fully funded, so they don't need to be considered in this budget. She projected total expenses of \$36,858 for the DRD and DRD-SC for the next two years. She said she included a 20 percent contingency fund for activities beyond core DRD activities, such as holding a forum or working on a project related to the watershed plan. It isn't absolutely necessary to keep the contingency fund, but it is helpful to have one if possible.

Peter said the question of activities is a good one. When the DRD-SC had its retreat in 2009, there was a desire to make this group more active and relevant. Now, the watershed plan has been completed and the IP and the NCA legislative effort are in progress. He said the question

is: What will the DRD do in the next couple of years and what role should the Steering Committee play?

Peter said the DRD has value for a number of reasons:

- It has name recognition.
- It plays a key role in gathering the community to vet important efforts involving the Dolores River. The annual DRD meetings continue to be forums for discussing important issues. Peter said the DRD should also be helping to hold forums on topics of special interest.
- The DRD-SC has a mechanism in place for evaluating river-related proposals.
- The DRD can bring constituents together to have conversations in an informed manner.

Peter recommended that the DRD continue to host biannual meetings. It will need to figure out a schedule for helping the community digest the NCA outline and IP. At its spring meeting, the DRD will need to consider issues related to hydrology and the snowpack; there will be other issues to consider in the fall. That would mean having full DRD meetings in May and October, or around those times, and the DRD's limited resources could be utilized to prepare for those community-wide forums. He said there is not much room in the budget to do extra work, so the group needs to make sure it meets only when necessary.

Marsha said the SWCD has been supportive of the concept of the DRD as a discussion and forums group.

Don agreed that the DRD has name recognition. He said it is a dialogue, and the ability to continue a civil, constructive conversation on very contentious issues is important. The group needs money to continue playing that role. It is important to be as frugal as possible, but a base of money is needed in order to stay alive.

Don said he believes the DRD needs to remain involved in the NCA legislation and the IP and how they mesh. The dialogue needs to take place through the DRD so it remains civil and constructive. He doesn't know what that will mean in terms of meetings, but these are big issues that are on the horizon.

Amber said because this is the year when these efforts will come to fruition, the DRD may not want to take on more projects at this time. It should focus on the legislation and the IP, then consider starting different projects two years from now under the watershed plan.

Drew said some members of the DRD-SC such as himself are volunteers and aren't paid to attend these meetings, so it would be best not to meet unless absolutely necessary. He said having a facilitator is expensive, and suggested cutting back on items such as funding for contract staff and picking some of those expenses back up in 2016 if possible. He said a contingency fund is a must, and agreed with Peter and Don about the importance of keeping the dialogue going.

Marsha said she appreciated his honesty and that it is certainly reasonable for the DRD-SC to try to reduce funding for contract staff. She said the seven hours she charges for a meeting is an accurate number because preparation and work behind the scenes takes a lot of time.

Phyllis agreed that it would be good to have fewer meetings. She recommended concentrating on the full DRD meetings rather than the DRD-SC meetings every couple of months. She said the local Farm Bureau board is having conference calls and using the Internet to save on costs of meetings.

Lee-Ann said fewer meetings with more substance would be good. She believes there is still a need for the DRD to keep conversations civilized and to provide education.

Greg said as a representative of the people who own the majority of the water rights in this area, he likes to know what the enemy is planning, but he doesn't want to fund the enemy. He thinks the DRD is a good place to have constructive conversations. He would like to see some specific delineations of what the DRD expects and what its goals are. He said there are probably still some legitimate concerns to be hashed out in the DRD-SC, but he hasn't seen them.

Marsha said there are conversations happening now around the issues that seem to be the most contentious – primarily the Implementation Team and IP, and the Legislative Subcommittee. Also, the DRD-SC has a process for evaluating project proposals; so far, three projects have come before it for analysis, including the proposed lease by MVI.

Don said the easiest way to trim the budget is to have fewer meetings and he supports that, but he believes the DRD does fill a critical role, and in order to play that role, it must go through a budget process. He said there is a role for the Steering Committee in helping the DRD with its broader discussions. As soon as there is real substance to the IP and the NCA legislation, the DRD-SC will have a critical part to play in the public-comment processes. Don said he too is a volunteer but he finds value in regular updates, even if they are minimal, because they prepare people for when issues arise. Don said he prefers in-person meetings to the Internet. He said civil, constructive dialogue needs to continue regarding controversial issues and the DRD shouldn't lose the ability to do that.

Marsha said every meeting of the DRD-SC costs about \$800. If it met just four times a year, the group could save \$3,200 over two years.

Peter said the DRD-SC may be able to meet sometimes without Marsha and Gail. The group could have a conference call or meet at a café, or meet at the district offices without a facilitator and recorder. Marsha said it is a good sign that this group is comfortable with the concept of self-facilitating.

Don said minutes may not be needed, but asked who would do the email tree and set up the non-facilitated meetings. Amber offered to do that. Peter said he likes the consistency of hearing from Marsha and suggested she could prepare the agendas even for the non-facilitated meetings. This would keep her in the loop. Marsha said that would require a couple hours of her time and she would be amenable to that.

There was general consensus that:

- The contingency fund is important to cover unexpected situations and should be retained.

- The budget should remain approximately as it is, but the group will start trying to scale back at its next meeting.
- The DRD-SC will plan to have fewer facilitated/recorded meetings. It may have some additional ones that are non-facilitated/recorded, but Marsha will continue to prepare the agenda for those.
- The DRD will seek a two-year grant from SWCD for \$30,000. If approved, the funding will come in installments, so the group can reassess the budget as it sees how things are working.

Don said it would be helpful if other entities could contribute even a minimal amount to the DRD to show support. Possible contributions from other entities were discussed including TNC, SJCA, DWCD, Trout Unlimited, Dolores River Boating Advocates, the Farm Bureau, the Livestock Association and Montezuma, Dolores, and San Miguel counties.

Peter thanked Marsha for her professionalism and her openness to different ideas.

Next steps:

→ Marsha will prepare the draft grant request to the SWCD and will send it out by email.

Implementation Team and Plan update: Peter said the IT met in early December to review the Implementation Plan’s final chapter, which is about stocking of native fish and predation by non-native fish and was prepared by Jim White of Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The joint water boards have reviewed that chapter. Mike Preston typically brings that feedback back to the IT and the team will go from there. Matt Clark of the IT has been asked to assemble the different chapters into a complete document. The IT is waiting to see the record of decision for the final Tres Rios/San Juan RMP. The latest version included three native fish species as ORVs rather than the single species, the roundtail chub, that had been listed in the draft RMP, so that raised concerns among the water community. An important part of revising the IP was deciding on the goals for the native fish, and the team had worked through that by being specific about each species according to reach. This could now be affected by inclusion of the two sucker species as ORVs.

Don said the introduction chapter of the IP is very important and became more so because of the added ORVs. Other elements in the final RMP also complicate things in the IP.

Amber said the IT is waiting for the BLM’s final record of decision to see if those issues can be addressed in the introduction. The IP as it is written now does address and consider the other two native-fish species.

Marsha said it’s important to remember that the NCA legislation will trump the local RMPs. The legislation will identify the values being protected. It acts as a mission statement and guidance for the BLM. Amber agreed and said there will be a “purposes” statement in the legislation where important values will be identified for the NCA. There may be some negotiation around what those values will be.

Peter said CPW manages for the fish, regardless of whether they are listed as ORVs. The CPW has signed a range-wide conservation agreement for those three native species.

Don said the introduction provided some description of that agreement and probably referenced the draft RMP with the one ORV. Now things have changed. He said this has to be addressed and how this is done is critical.

Peter said there will likely need to be additional review and feedback of the introduction and goals sections.

Legislative Subcommittee update: Amber said the boundary of the NCA, water language, and support from Montrose County remain key issues for the Legislative Subcommittee. The subcommittee has also been working through a list of other issues and has been meeting once a month. Recent developments include:

- The subcommittee has finally been able to obtain detailed maps and wants to meet with private landowners soon to discuss the boundary.
- Montrose County officials recently said they are very interested in being part of the NCA legislation and that they may be amenable to letting the wilderness study area within their county be designated as wilderness as part of the NCA package. There will be continued outreach to and discussions with Montrose County.
- A small group of the subcommittee is starting to work on water language for the legislation, but has not agreed on any language yet.

Marsha said the LDWG will be reconvened soon to discuss the package of legislative principles; then the water boards and other groups will give input.

Funding for the Slickrock gauge: Lee-Ann said she represents the Dolores River Boating Advocates and emphasized that local boaters are a diverse group. They sympathize with the causes voiced at this table and do not always agree among themselves.

She said O&M for the Slickrock gauge costs \$16,500 a year. The gauge benefits everyone. It can monitor habitat and recreational flows. She is working on finding out all the entities that use it and why. She has spoken with Bruce Whitehead, SWCD executive director, about a possible grant from the SWCD to keep the gauge operating. They discussed a joint application for funding in which locals would try to come up with matching funds, ideally 1-to-1, which would mean \$8,250 is needed for the match. Lee-Ann said DRBA contributed \$2,000, has several partners already, and is looking for more. She and Mike Preston are working on the details. She said the SWCD will not want them to return for funding regularly, so locals need to look for more line-item funding.

Don said the major use of the gauge is probably for the boaters, but it has value for DRD science and biology. The DWCD may consider contributing to the funding.

Next steps:

→ Anyone who wants to contribute should talk to Lee-Ann.

Minutes: The minutes of Oct. 29, 2013, were approved with no changes.

Next meetings: The next meeting of the DRD-SC will be Tuesday, March 4, at 9 a.m. If anyone wants to meet informally before that date, they should contact Marsha and she can arrange it.

The next meeting of the full DRD was tentatively set for Wednesday, April 9.