

COLORADO RIVER BASIN SALINITY CONTROL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Minutes of Meeting
October 22-23, 2024
Scottsdale, AZ and Virtual

Approval of Minutes:

CLARENCE FULLARD Digitally signed by
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Bill Hasencamp
1/27/2025

Advisory Council Beginning Time:

Wednesday June 5, 2024, 1:30 p.m. (MDT)

Designated Federal Officer
Presiding:

Clarence Fullard
Chairman Bill Hasencamp

I. Welcome, Introductions

Hasencamp

Chairman Bill Hasencamp called the Advisory Council meeting to order at approximately 1:30 p.m. (PDT) and welcomed those in attendance. An attendance roster of those participating in the meeting, both in-person and virtually, is included as Appendix A. Hasencamp also congratulated Clarence Fullard for graduating from the Colorado River Water Leaders Program.

II. Opening Comments

Fullard

Fullard gave the opening comments. He welcomed everyone to the Advisory Council meeting and reminded the group that Advisory Council is 50 years old and has existed alongside the Forum for many years. He explained that the Advisory Council serves as the conduit through which information is shared with federal officials in Washington, D.C. Fullard also recognized Kristen Johnson who was attending as an alternate to Clint Chandler.

Fullard informed the group that the Advisory Council's charter had been approved earlier in the year with no changes and signed by the agencies. In response to a question, he clarified that the charter is valid for two years, and unless he receives input from Council members, changes are typically not made. After a discussion, Fullard proposed adding the review and potential discussion of charter changes on a future Advisory Council meeting agenda prior to the next renewal process.

III. Review and Approval of Agenda **Hasencamp**

Hasencamp then called for a review of the proposed agenda and a motion to adopt it. The agenda was adopted, as proposed, by motion and is included as Appendix B.

IV. Minutes of June 2024 Advisory Council Meeting **Fullard**

The Council then discussed a new process for reviewing and approving the Advisory Council meeting minutes. Fullard explained that the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) rules require that minutes be reviewed and approved within 90 days of a public meeting, which is not compatible with the process employed in the past. He indicated that moving forward the review and comment on the draft minutes by Advisory Council members will need to occur via email after which he and the Chair will sign them, and they will be posted on the website.

V. Items from the Forum **Mitchell**

Vice Chair Becky Mitchell reported that the Forum met earlier in the day and offered three items for consideration by the Advisory Council:

1. Recommended FY2025 Program funding levels
2. Recommendations regarding the FY2025 management of the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund
3. A letter of concern regarding the proposed Dolores Canyons National Monument.

Hasencamp confirmed that these items would be covered later on the Advisory Council agenda.

VI. Federal Agency Reports on 2024 Accomplishments

A. U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Fullard
Fullard began Reclamation's report by discussing the salinity organization within Reclamation (see Appendix C). He highlighted the staff members in the Salt Lake office and then noted the significant number of Reclamation employees working on salinity control in the Grand Junction office. He reviewed other water quality efforts beyond salinity control projects and then provided an overview of salinity specific efforts. Fullard mentioned that Reclamation staff conducted a field review of several projects in the spring. He then reviewed slides of the currently open Basinwide Program projects (totaling 39,270 tons of salt savings at a cost of \$72.2 million) and Basin States Program projects (totaling 16,917 tons of salt savings at a cost of \$28.2 million). Fullard then turned to a discussion of the six projects awarded under the 2023/2024 NOFO. He highlighted the Hartland Ditch Improvement Project. He showed pictures of the existing canal and then discussed the efforts to determine habitat replacement needs.

In response to a question about verifying salt savings from a project, Tom Marston and

Cory Williams explained that there is significant pre-project work to determine the salt loading, but less post-project verification. However, studies have been conducted to verify the salinity savings within project areas. Also, in response to a question there was a discussion that historically, salinity projects have focused on irrigation distribution systems but not as much on preventing saline drainage water from further dissolving salts. It was noted that many of the drainage systems are subsurface, such as tile drains, and it was noted that there is no clear project sponsor for such efforts, and it may not be allowed under NOFO language.

B. Natural Resources Conservation Service

Mote

Travis Mote provided the report for NRCS (see Appendix D). He provided several slides showing NRCS's salinity organization and noted that until a new salinity coordinator is hired, he would serve in that role. Mote reported that since the Program's inception, NRCS (USDA) has provided about \$451 million in financial assistance to treat 375,000 acres for a total of 688,000 tons of salinity reduction. He gave a state-by-state report on EQIP obligations for salinity control in 2024 (see Appendix D). Mote reviewed NRCS's 3-Year Funding Plan for salinity control, emphasizing that while the numbers shown are preliminary, they should be pretty close to actual future allocations. Regarding Program implementation issues, Mote indicated that both Colorado and Utah have experienced a notable increase in contract cancellations in the last few years. He indicated that at one point in 2024 Utah was as high as 35% cancellations but that it dropped down to about 20% by the end of the year. He indicated that the most common reason for cancellations is that as applicants get part way through the process, they realize that due to inflationary cost increases they cannot afford to complete the project. Mote noted that NRCS field staff had indicated to him that the biggest cost increases were from center pivots, but other components of irrigation efficiency improvements have also gone up in cost. To address this, NRCS Utah is looking at changing their payment schedule away from a set price per acre to a price per foot of center pivot which might help make the systems more affordable. He also indicated that the State of Utah has a water conservation program which some irrigators are also using in addition to the EQIP funding, and they are working with the state on the timing of the two programs as irrigators are reluctant to sign one contract before both are in hand. In response to a timing question, Mote clarified that NRCS begins developing on-farm projects about a year before off-farm NOFO projects are completed so that they are ready to be installed shortly after completion of the canal piping or lining efforts. He indicated that NRCS does not want to get too far out ahead of the completion of off-farm efforts as irrigators might get caught with project cost increases.

Mote then discussed the Water Management Entity (WME) opportunities in EQIP under the 2019 Farm Bill. He indicated that this allows entities to contract with NRCS for up to \$900,000 under EQIP for piping project, whereas in the past, contracts could only be entered into with individual producers. He indicated that the program is gaining interest and there have been a few WME projects in salinity areas, but they need to work on increasing awareness of this program among entities.

Clint Evans then reported. He confirmed that NRCS Colorado also experienced a number of cancellations in 2024. He noted that often producers would go all the way to the end of design and then back out due to costs. He said that in 2025 they plan to address this

problem by identifying estimated costs early in the process.

Evans then reported on a significant project at Windy Gap Reservoir which has taken 26 years to complete and required a number of partners. This has created a number of wildlife benefits in the Colorado River by reconnecting the Colorado River around the reservoir.

Ronnie Maurer then reported from NRCS Washington. He indicated that discussions are occurring for a new farm bill, but that under the Inflation Reduction Act, NRCS has authority to continue the basic programs related to salinity control activities.

C. U.S. Geological Survey

Marston

Marston provided the initial report for USGS (see Appendix E). He indicated that he would continue to act as the USGS salinity coordinator with Cory Williams representing Colorado and Cheryl Miller acting as the new representative for Wyoming. Miller introduced herself. She is a hydrologist and now the investigations section chief for USGS in Wyoming. Miller then provided a brief report on USGS' study of the Black's Fork (tributary to the Green River) area. The focus of the 2018-2019 study was to determine the salt contribution from the Blacks Fork to the Green River. During the study they found that, as expected in the dry year of 2018, the salinity concentrations were greater, but the total load was smaller than in the wetter year 2019. The USGS sought to correlate streamflow to TDS concentrations. They found that at low streamflow the TDS concentrations were high, but the inverse was not necessarily true – at some high stream flows they also observed high concentrations. In general, there was an increase in TDS moving downstream, but it appears that the TDS was most influenced by the nature of the water in local tributaries.

Marston reviewed the nature of the science support which USGS provides to the salinity control program. He reviewed the FY2024 studies in which USGS is engaged and how they fall into the four areas of science support. He reviewed USGS's 20-Streamage Stream Network. He indicated to the group that he had previously reported that a handful of sites had dropped to a Class B streamgaging classification. That was principally due to a lack of visits during COVID, but he has now reviewed those sites and when they are next reviewed, they will be classified again as Class A. Marston also reminded the Council of the previous salinity data gap effort. He discussed the several low-date acquisition need studies which were underway but reported that there has not been too much push from the states to enter into the more data required studies. There was a discussion on New Mexico's potential interest in studies in the San Juan Drainage.

Williams then provided a report on the Cimarron Creek study. He indicated that over a three-year period USGS sampled Cimarron Creek and measured seepage losses in the Cimarron Canal to estimate the impact of the canal seepage on salinity in the creek. He also reported on USGS' efforts to create an interactive Colorado River salinity map. The map is a repository of published information and contains a number of data layers. It will be available to the public and only requires an Internet connection. The map will show data from static websites. It will be interactive in that one will be able to zoom in and query the data, but the data need to be found on static sites. It is anticipated that a link to the map will be provided on the Forum's website.

Marston then reported on their monsoonal flow study which has been ongoing for several years (should be completed in 2025). He indicated that there is a unique relationship between TDS and specific conductance for the San Rafael and the Virgin River watersheds. He then reported on the synoptic work being done in the Spanish Valley which has shown that the increase in load through the Spanish Valley is not insignificant. This has led to an additional effort which will occur in early 2025 to better quantify the salt discharge. In response to a question, Marston indicated that in about 2015 the USGS did a fairly extensive study of the fresh groundwater system in the Spanish Valley. However, information from the study has not been put into a model which would allow for the forecasting impacts of changes in water usage.

D. Bureau of Land Management

Cutillo/Sondergard

Paula Cutillo and Jed Sondergard reported for BLM (see Appendix F). Cutillo presented BLM's salinity organizational chart highlighting recent changes in red. Cutillo is with the headquarters office, but located in Denver, Colorado, and Sondergard is in the National Operations Center, but he is located in Montrose, Colorado. Cutillo oversees the overall program and the coordination with headquarters and Sondergard coordinates with the field offices on potential projects and their implementation. Cutillo explained that BLM's salinity control program is implemented through their Aquatic Resources Program. She then reviewed the timing of salinity project review, funding and reporting, recommending that the best way for salinity partners to provide input on projects would be through the field offices before projects are submitted for funding in the spring. She reported that the preliminary funding for salinity was reduced by about 6% due to an agency-wide administrative cost increase. Since 2021, BLM's salinity funding has not been Congressionally directed since 2021. Once a funding bill passes, if there is an increase in the appropriation, monies could be restored to salinity. Cutillo then reported on funding by state office since 2020 and projected that BLM's 2025 allocation will be about \$1.9 million.

Sondergard detailed the projects funded in 2024 and then reported on several specific projects, including:

- About 88 acres of tamarisk in the Big Warren area in northwestern Arizona were treated. The tamarisk were compromising the erosion control structures in that area.
- BLM completed the Fort Pearce Wash erosion control structures in the Arizona Strip. In 2024, 18 erosion control structures were continued or completed in this area.
- In Colorado the Horse Creek project was completed. This project is designed to maintain the cottonwood gallery to reduce erosion in this high salinity area. It involved treating creek head cuts with rocks and installing a culvert to prevent further head cutting.
- In Wyoming in the Muddy Creek Watershed a series of incised streams were treated with Beaver Dam Analogues and Post Assisted Log Structures. Sondergard indicated that this had been a long-term project and funding would continue in FY2025.

Sondergard reviewed a slide which showed the allocation of funds provided to projects, assessment and monitoring, and research. He also projected their funding of projects in FY2025. He indicated that they plan to fund 16 projects in five states for a total of \$1.9 million. The projected percentage of dollars spent on projects, research and monitoring is different in 2025 as BLM is funding three significant USGS studies in Colorado totaling \$675,000. He then showed the preliminary budget allocations to projects for FY2025. Included in that funding is a project in the Yellowjacket Creek drainage in the Cortez area which seeks to restore riparian areas and reduce erosion in an area where BLM has removed tamarisk and non-native Russian olives. He reported that in January 2025 BLM intends to work with USGS and host a research symposium and discuss studies and salinity priority areas.

- E. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Broderdorp
Kurt Broderdorp provided a report for USFWS (see Appendix G). The only change in their organization relative to salinity was in their eastern Colorado field office. Broderdorp reminded the Council that the salinity control act directs the Secretary of the Interior to replace incidental fish and wildlife values foregone due to implementation of the salinity control efforts. He indicated that he has performed several site visits to observe habitat replacement projects. Several of the projects have faced water delivery challenges, but improvements are being made. Broderdorp indicated that in 2024 there were no salinity project Section 7 consultations. He discussed EQIP habitat replacement efforts. These can be seen on several tables in Appendix G. Lastly, Broderdorp indicated that there was limited progress to report on proactively finding future habitat replacement sites. He plans to collaborate with partners on this request moving forward. In response to a question, Broderdorp indicated that USFWS does not keep track of the amount of water used at mitigation sites.
- F. Environmental Protection Agency Ismert
Peter Ismert provided EPA's report (Appendix H). He reviewed EPA personnel involved in the program. He indicated that under the Clean Water Act there are a number of programs which feed into the water quality standards. He reported on the status of the adoption of the salinity standard by states pursuant to the Forum's reviews. He reported on a new EPA rule which requires that tribal reserved water rights be considered in adopting water quality standards. Ismert reported that the Federal Tribal Baseline Water Quality Standards effort is languishing but should be adopted fairly soon. He also reported on the tribes within the Colorado River Basin who have adopted water quality standards. He shared a success story where a section of the Lower Gunnison River was removed from the 303(d) list for selenium improvements, partly due to salinity control projects. Lastly, Ismert reported on the NPDES Program implementation occurring under the direction of EPA in the Colorado River Basin.

VII. Reclamation

Melynda Roberts reported on implementation of the Basinwide and Basin States Programs (see Appendix I which includes Roberts' presentation along with detailed expenditure tables which she handed out to the Council). She first reviewed Basinwide Program projects, both

those which had been 100% funded and those which were then partially funded. In response to a question, Roberts reminded the group that there was a FOA in 2020 and then a NOFO in 2024. She explained that the reason there was not one in 2022 was due to the pipe-price increases which required all of the appropriations and so there was not sufficient funding to issue a new FOA that year. She reviewed a table of projected expenditures under the Basinwide Program through 2027. She then reported on the Basin States Program and showed tables with projected expenditure amounts. This includes contracts for administration, studies and projects. Due to a question, there was a discussion on the carry-over of funds under the Basinwide and Basin States Programs. Reclamation indicated that it is easier to carry over Basin State Program dollars as they are unappropriated dollars, but they are able to justify the carryover of Basinwide Program dollars as well. There was discussion by the Council on the relationship between the carryover and the accrual in the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund. Roberts reviewed her accounting spreadsheet and the present accrual. It was noted that the spreadsheet would change once the funding fix legislation passes. Patrick Dent requested the total expenditure data, emphasizing that accrual issues represent only a small percentage of the total Lower Basin Fund payments.

The Advisory Council meeting then recessed until 8:30 a.m. on October 23.

Jolaine Saxton reported on the status of the Lower Colorado River Basin Development Fund (see Appendix J). Saxton reviewed the role of the Western Area Power Administration in the marketing, billing, and collections of salinity dollars. She reported on total deposits and transfers in FY2024 showing a total remaining balance of \$1.9 million. She indicated that they needed to close their books early in September and so it shows a lower collection number. She then shared several slides showing projections of future salinity revenues. She indicated that over the next five years the projections show an increase in salinity income under the best-case and medium scenarios but not under the worst-case scenario. She indicated that the CRMMS model is used for projections over the next five years. The models only use conservation agreements which are final and not those which are currently under discussion.

- VIII. Allocation of Payments Between Upper and Lower Basin Funds** **Roberts**
Roberts showed the Council the criteria to be used by the Secretary in determining the cost-share split between the Upper Basin and Lower Basin funds. After a short discussion, there was a motion to continue with the 15/85 split between the funds. The motion passed.
- IX. Letter on the Management of the LCRBDF** **Hasencamp**
The Council then discussed the proposed letter conveying recommendations to Reclamation for the management of the LCRBDF in FY2025 to be co-signed by the Council and the Forum. After a discussion, a motion passed to approve the letter.
- X. Direction to the Technical Advisory Group (TAG)** **Hasencamp/Mead**
The Council talked about potential recommendations to the TAG for future studies and investigations. Fullard noted that there had been a discussion on a potential groundwater study or development of a groundwater model for the Spanish Valley, including a suggestion that the Science Team explore the potential that others cost share in such model development. There was also a recommendation that the Science Team consider potential

expansion needs of the interactive mapping effort once the first version is released. There was also a suggestion that the Science Team consider how best to quantify the water usage associated with habitat mitigation. Lastly, there was a discussion that Science Team consider options for confirming salinity control achievements and report on prior studies in this area.

XI. 2024 Advisory Council Report Hasencamp

The Council then considered FY2025 program funding recommendations. Upon motion the Council adopted the program funding recommendations which had been previously distributed to the Council for consideration. Hasencamp then turned to recommendations to be included in the 2024 Advisory Council Report. Dent suggested that the Federal Accomplishments Report include details on total funding in the program from the agencies and an accounting of funds collected from the Upper and Lower Basin funds. Fullard suggested that they have been considering changes to the FAR and how it might be more concise and that the suggested information could best be included in an appendix. He also indicated that Reclamation is discussing the relationship between the FAR and the Quality of Water Progress Report. Dent requested that the FAR provide information on tons of salt controlled and dollars spent.

XII. Other Business/Action Hasencamp

Hasencamp then asked for a report on the proposed Dolores Canyons National Monument and a potential letter to be sent to the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture and/or the Administer of EPA alerting them to the potential jeopardy the designation of a Dolores Canyons National Monument could have on the Paradox Valley Unit if provisions are not made to allow current and future salinity control in the Paradox Valley. There was a detailed discussion on a potential letter with Council members weighing in on the content of the proposed letter and the proposed, to-be-attached, fact sheet. There was also a discussion on to whom the letter should be addressed. Ultimately, by motion, the Council approved the proposed letter with the discussed edits and directed that the letter be sent to the Secretary of the Interior, as well as potentially to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Administrator of EPA, as appropriate. There was an assigned to work with Fullard on appropriate addressing, conveyance, and cc:'s to the letter.

XIII. Public Comment Hasencamp

It was then turned to the public for comments. No public comments were received.

XIV. Items to the Forum Hasencamp

There were no items to be taken to the Forum.

Advisory Council Adjournment Time: Wednesday October 23 at about 9:30 a.m. (PDT)