

# Rio Grande Basin Consortium: Mission, goals, and activities

Deborah A. Potter<sup>1</sup> and Deborah M. Finch<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract.-The** Rio Grande Basin Consortium (RGBC) serves as a networking group and clearinghouse for scientific information pertaining to the Rio Grande Basin. Its membership consists of natural and social scientists from New Mexico's three research universities, administrators, and resource managers from federal, state, and local governmental agencies, members of community and advocacy groups, and private citizens. Members share an interest in better understanding the physical, ecological, economic, social, and cultural dynamics of this drainage area. In this report, we briefly describe the history, mission, goals and objectives, past and current projects and partnerships, and funding of the Consortium.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Rio Grande Basin Consortium (RGBC) emerged from University of New Mexico's (UNM) Faculty Scholars' Program of 1989. It formed under the leadership of Dr. Jim Gosz and Dr. Eleonora Trotter (UNM Biology Department) primarily to serve as a networking group and clearing house for scientific information. Deborah M. Finch, USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Albuquerque, NM serves as current Consortium Chair and Dennis Engi, Sandia Laboratories, serves as Executive Director. The Consortium's most recent past Chair and Executive Director were Sarah Kotchian, City of Albuquerque, and Deborah Potter, USDA Forest Service, Southwestern Region, respectively. Many individuals have served on steering committees, especially participants from the UNM Natural Resources Center: Chris Nunn, Lee Brown, and Michele Minnis. The first major activity hosted by

the Consortium was a conference entitled *The Rio Grande Basin Global Climate Change Scenarios* held on June 1-2, 1990. The published proceedings (Stone et al. 1991) contained the Consortium's draft mission and goals which are still in place, with minor modification, today. The Consortium has continued to expand its interdisciplinary partnerships while maintaining established communication and information networks.

The mission of the Rio Grande Basin Consortium, revised at a business planning meeting held August 8, 1995, is "to provide a forum for diverse constituencies to address the current and future status of the Rio Grande Basin. We do this by improving understanding of the Basin, sharing that knowledge broadly and effectively to support informed decision-making, and fostering interdisciplinary cooperation."

The goals of the Consortium are to:

1. Increase awareness of the Rio Grande Basin as a fragile invaluable ecosystem with a unique cultural heritage, and increase commitment to the actions necessary to preserve the Basin;
2. Develop understanding of the interactions of economic, environmental, and cultural process within the Basin through the integration

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<sup>1</sup> Past RGBC Executive Director and General Physical Scientist, USDA Forest Service, 517 Gold Avenue SW, Albuquerque, NM 87102.

<sup>2</sup> RGBC Chair and Project Leader, USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, 2205 Columbia SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106.

of new information, scientific data, and indigenous knowledge and values;

3. Involve local communities in decision-making processes that result in more relevant and effective policies affecting the sustainability of the Basin;
4. Promote interdisciplinary, interagency, and international cooperation.

Consortium objectives are to:

1. Facilitate a process through which sustainability of the Basin will be enhanced by dialogue between diverse groups on values and issues in the Basin, leading to the establishment of common goals and joint actions for the future.
2. Enhance the exchange of information and multi-disciplinary data on the Basin in order to better understand the interactions of systems and values within the Basin.
3. Improve scientific inquiry through incorporation of local knowledge, and transfer scientific knowledge for use in decision-making by communities.
4. Maintain an active network among Consortium members to link individuals, communities, and agencies, insure that policies and programs work towards sustainability, and increase funding for interdisciplinary, intercommunity, and interagency Basin projects.
5. Improve coordination and cooperation between communities and local, state, and federal agencies.
6. Be a model of interrelated research, education, and action for use by other regions in their efforts towards sustainability.

## MEETINGS

In 1993, it was decided that the full Consortium would meet about four times per year, and it should continue to invite guest speakers. Meetings were held on October 15, 1993; January 21, 1994, on the topic of *Water Quality and Data Sharing*; and on March 25, 1994. Meeting notes are available.

Much effort was expended by Consortium members in planning and developing an all-Basin

conference entitled *Uniting the Basin* which was implemented under the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Sustainable Development Initiative (SDI). Pre-conference planning meetings were held in Taos on May 21, 1993 and in Socorro on June 25, 1993 and February 14-16, 1994. Conference objectives included communication among geographic areas, the creation of an ongoing structure to pursue the sustainability of the Rio Grande Basin, and integration of regional perspectives within Basin-wide planning.

## NEW PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

### 1. Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Sustainable Development Initiative (SDI).

Representatives from the Consortium served as the upper Basin working group in the all-Basin conference on sustainability entitled *Uniting the Basin*, May 19-22, 1994, in El Paso/Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. Nine Consortium representatives for the Upper Basin were: Blane Sanchez, Isleta Pueblo; Herman Agoyo, San Juan Pueblo; Brian Shields, Amigos Bravos; Chris **NUM**, UNM; Sarah Kotchian, City of Albuquerque; Eleonora Trotter, UNM; Deborah Potter, USDA Forest Service; Wilfred Rael; Martha Quintana, and Chris Canaly, Citizens for San Luis Valley Water. At-Large members from the Consortium were Robert Woodmansee of TERRA Laboratories, Dale Pontius of American Rivers and Eluid Martinez, State Engineer. Jim Gosz of UNM/National Science Foundation and Michele Minnis and Lee Brown of UNM also attended. Pat D'Andrea gave a slide presentation.

A \$25,000 grant to assist the Consortium's participation in the SDI Conference and provide for a Basin-wide preconference planning meeting was obtained from the General Service Foundation. The planning session was held in Albuquerque on February 13-15, 1994.

During the May conference, four themes were discussed in bi-lingual subgroups: Basin-wide sustainable development; local sustainable development; institutions throughout the Basin; and institutions along the Texas-Mexico border. A conference summary statement was published by

the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC 1994). Copies may be obtained by writing to Center for Global Studies, HARC, 4800 Research Forest Drive, The Woodlands, Texas 77381.

The SDI was primarily funded by a \$200,000 Ford Foundation grant administered by the Houston Advanced Research Center. Additional funding of \$100,000 was made available for follow-up activities. Issues of the SDI newsletter *La Corriente* were published throughout the year (since July 1993). National Science Foundation funding of \$25,000 for a follow-up workshop was obtained by HARC.

## **2. Sustainable Biosphere Initiative (SBI).**

This initiative was established by the Ecological Society of America in August 1988 to define ecological research priorities: that research agenda was published in a 1991 issue of *Ecology*. The Rio Grande Basin was named as a regional global change demonstration area through the Initiative. On August 10, 1993, representatives of the Consortium formally discussed its interest in the Rio Grande as a demonstration project with representatives of SBI: comments delivered by Sarah Kotchian on behalf of the Consortium are available. A proposal dated October 20, 1993, was prepared to define a process for the demonstration. [SBI is currently funded by the National Science Foundation.] As a follow-up to the SBI meeting on August 10, 1993, a proposal dated October 20, 1993, was prepared to define a process for the Rio Grande pilot site according to the SBI Regional Action Plans: A Systems Approach to Link Scientific Knowledge and Resource Management Needs. After a second meeting on November 3, 1993, it was decided in Washington that the BLM would lead the demonstration project, and the RGBC would lead the associated action plan. SBI funding was not appropriated for the pilot studies.

## **3. Survey of Northern and Southern New Mexico Communities.**

To prepare for the SDI, Consortium member, Chris Nunn surveyed 447 water users, agency personnel, and citizens of the Northern Rio Grande about their attitudes toward water and sustainable development. The results of 15 questions included

in the survey are summarized in the July 1993 issue of the newsletter *La Corriente*.

## **4. Partnership with Amigos Bravos.**

Brian Shields of Amigos Bravos (Taos) presented his work on a NM Statewide Rivers Assessment to the Consortium for input. This assessment and data base is being prepared by Amigos Bravos and the New Mexico Natural Heritage Program to provide a basis for improved resource allocation and conservation decisions.

## **5. Partnership with TERRA Labs.**

The Terrestrial Ecosystems Regional Research and Analysis (TERRA) Laboratory in Fort Collins selected the Rio Grande Basin as a testbed for regional scale analysis of ecosystem processes. Acting Director, Dr. Doug Fox has been discussing potential partnerships between the Consortium and TERRA for testing collaboration technologies and other aspects of their decision support system that links natural and social sciences. TERRA facilitated an electronic brainstorming session using IBM Team-Focus software on April 15, 1993, to discuss Consortium topics such as SDI.

## **6. Research by USDA Forest Service.**

The Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station in Albuquerque received \$400,000 in 1994 and 1995 for a proposal entitled *Watershed processes, riparian zone responses, and biological diversity of the Rio Grande Basin*. Partnerships with the Consortium included hosting research programs at Consortium meetings; participation in *Dia del Rio*, a celebration of the Rio Grande on October 21, 1995 (and thereafter); financial assistance to Deborah Potter, Consortium member, for graduate training at UNM; and Consortium poster display at the Riparian Symposium, September 18-22, 1995. Deborah Finch, current Consortium Chair, is Team Leader for this Forest Service Research Program.

## **7. Bosque Management.**

Representatives of the Consortium met with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on March 10, 1994, April 4, 1994, and September 28, 1994 to discuss

the Consortium's role in implementation of the Bosque Biological Management Plan (Crawford et al. 1993). The Director requested that the Consortium submit a proposal to begin implementation of the Plan, including funding a position. Members of the steering committee also met informally on April 7, 1994 with Sue deen Kelley of the Bosque Management Task Force established by Senator Domenici's Rio Grande Bosque Conservation Committee. The Consortium's RGBC proposal subcommittee met on various occasions including July 8, 1994. A formal proposal for the arrangement was drafted in August 1994, and a pre-proposal was submitted on September 6, 1994. Due to changes in FWS personnel, the Consortium's proposal was dropped; however, the Consortium is currently developing new ideas for addressing the Bosque Biological Management Plan. For example, the Consortium's sponsorship of *Dia del Rio* is a community involvement project designed to promote greater appreciation, understanding, and resources for the Rio Grande. While *Dia del Rio* includes the entire Rio Grande/Rio Bravo Basin, the Consortium is focusing its efforts on the middle Rio Grande where the Bosque is mostly found.

## **8. Sevilleta Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER).**

Representatives participated in a meeting sponsored by UNM and USDA Forest Service (Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station) February 9-11, 1994 and on July 26, 1994, to discuss information exchange and research coordination among agencies and groups active within the Rio Grande Basin. The group supported a legislative proposal to establish the Rio Grande Institute for Environmental Studies at UNM. The Consortium agreed to work cooperatively with the Institute and LTER toward our shared research goals.

## **9. Riparian symposium.**

The Consortium held a quarterly meeting on September 18, 1995, in association with the symposium on *Desired Future Conditions for Southwestern Riparian Ecosystems: Bringing Interests and Concerns Together*, September 18-22, 1995, Albuquerque, NM. Deborah Potter and Deborah Finch presented a poster display about the Rio Grande Basin Con-

sortium at the symposium, and this paper is the written version of the symposium poster. Information about *Dia del Rio* was presented at the symposium, during the poster session and in session announcements.

## **10. Dia del Rio.**

The Consortium hosted the middle Rio Grande portion of the Basin-wide celebration, *Dia del Rio*, October 21, 1995. *Dia del Rio* is a citizen-led event organized under the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo SDI. *Dia del Rio* is both a call to action and a celebration of the basin's rich diversity, drawing attention to the critical state of the basin's rivers, riparian habitat, and ground water. It will also serve as a demonstration of public commitment to improve the quality of life in the basin. The Consortium, under the leadership of Julie Stephens, Consortium member, has solicited numerous activities and events by Albuquerque teachers, Pueblo associations, and government agencies, including water travel ceremonies, Rio Grande seminars, bosque bird-watching trips, river clean-up events, and poster exhibits. *Dia del Rio* was designed as an annual event to be held the third Saturday of every October.

## **FUND RAISING**

### **Janelia Grant.**

A \$5,500 proposal to cover the salary of Chris Nunn to serve as the newsletter editor of *La Corriente* was funded to UNM Natural Resource Center (Lee Brown, Director) in 1994.

### **Gauntlett Foundation Grant.**

A \$60,000 proposal for planning the February 1994, SDI conference, including funding for facilitators, subgroups, and salary for the workshop coordinator received a favorable review; however, the foundation dissolved prior to the award.

### **General Service Foundation.**

A \$25,000 grant to assist the Consortium's participation in the SDI Conference and provide

for a Basin-wide preconference planning meeting was obtained from the General Service Foundation. The planning session was held in Albuquerque on February 13-15, 1994.

### **Ford Foundation.**

A \$100,000 award for additional funding for SDI-related activities was awarded by the Ford Foundation, based on the success of the *Uniting the Basin* conference. Some of this money was channeled to all five of the Basin subgroups. Amigos Bravos received the funds to facilitate the *Dia del Rio* celebration in the Upper Basin, and the Consortium received \$2,500 to sponsor and solicit events in the middle Rio Grande reach, including the Albuquerque area and surrounding Pueblos.

## **LITERATURE CITED**

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