

WINTER WATER STORAGE PROGRAM
Board of Trustees Special Meeting Minutes
January 20, 2026

A Winter Water Trustees virtual meeting began at 1:04 p.m. Margie Medina announced those in attendance.

Representatives for the Board of Trustees

Greg Williams, Catlin Canal; Stacey Sober, Colorado Canal; Curtis Sniff, Fort Lyon Canal; Darren Grap, High Line Canal; Donny Hansen, Holbrook Mutual Irrigation Ditch; Jeff Baylor, Las Animas Canal; Alan Ward, West Pueblo Ditch; Adrian Burgess, Oxford Ditch; and Josh Reinert (joined at 10:11 a.m.), Amity Canal.

Bessemer Ditch and Riverside Dairy Ditch had no representatives present.

Others present: Jeremy Dutton (joined at 1:11), Holbrook Ditch; Frank Valencia, Colorado Canal; Casey Williams, Catlin Canal; Austin Malotte, BBA Water Consultants, Inc.; Ryan Dalton; Coleb (last name/organization not identified); Rachell Zancanella, Jason Ullman, Bethany Arnold (joined at 1:23), Lonnie Spady, Brian Lenherr (1:16), Dan Henrichs; Jessi Harris, Brady Cole – Division of Water Resources. SECWCD Staff - Leann Noga, Chris Woodka, Michelle Tocydlowski, Gordon Dillon, and Margie Medina. Lee Miller and Peter Levish SECWCD attorneys.

Rachell Zancanella provided a PowerPoint presentation titled, *Winter Water Storage Program 101*.

Background for Winter History of Use of Water Rights

The *Idealized Map of Arkansas River* that was used for the HI model.

Direct Flow Rights	Storage Rights
Bessemer 70.65 cfs 3/31/1882 or senior	Lake Henry 12/31/1889
Colorado Canal 756.28 cfs 6/8/1890	Lake Meredith 3/9/1898
Rocky Ford Highline 89.1 cfs 3/7/1884 or senior	Holbrook Reservoir 3/2/1892
Oxford Farmers Ditch 129.4 cfs 2/25/1887 or senior	Dye Reservoir 10/10/1903
Catlin /Canal 248 cfs 12/3/1884 or senior	Great Plains Reservoirs (Amity) 8/1/1896
Holbrook Canal 155 cfs 9/25/1889	Adobe Reservoir 1/25/1906
Fort Lyon Canal 164.64 cfs 4/15/1884	Horse Creek Reservoir 1/25/1906
Las Animas Consolidated 49.5 cfs 12/3/1884 or senior	

The basis for the pre-Program diversions for irrigation averaged 102,437-acre feet (AF) from 1950 to 1975 during November 15 through March 14th. The actual winter diversions for storage averaged 40,042 AF.

Story of Cooperation for Pilot Project (Innovate/Cooperate)

Formulation of a concept was created that envisioned Pueblo Reservoir as storage for trans mountain water as well as potential storage under the Winter Water Storage Program (WWSP). Charles “Tommy” Thompson, District Manager for Southeastern was a driving force in recognizing better water management of native Arkansas basin water rights and was key to better managing any west slope imports. Division 2 Engineer Bob Jesse started on the pilot project for the WWSP operations in 1976. He worked with water users to see how reoperations could be achieved without injury to other water rights or without creating a compact violation.

The Board of Trustees was formed from the participating companies and Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District (SECWCD) to determine how operations would occur. Russ Livingston, an engineer with USGS, developed a transit loss study so deliveries of winter water during the irrigation system could be made without interfering with direct flow rights, what is now used by the Division of Water Resources (DWR) as the color of water tool.

Obtaining A Water Decree

First Years of Operation Pre-Decree

Voluntary winter storage operations were conducted prior to filing an application in Water Court during 1976, 1977 and 1979 to 1983 (no program in 1978). River call for the voluntary program years was typically set to October 15, 1907 (Pisgah Reservoir call) rather than calling for water pursuant to the more senior decrees. The 1980 operating agreement along with some change in place of storage decrees allowed John Martin Reservoir to begin to be used as a place of storage in the WWSP. First water court application was filed in 1984 with an amended application filed in 1986.

Key elements of the decree designated how the first 100,000 AF of storage would be divided.

1. Ditch companies with no storage rights received 28% and divided among them, the allocation based on pre-program actual winter use.
2. Ditch companies with storage rights received 72% and divided among them the allocation based on the combination of actual pre-programmed direct irrigation and storage use.
3. Then the next 2,750 AF to the Amity for storage in Great Plains or John Martin Reservoir.
4. The next 356 AF to the Holbrook for storage. A 25 percent (direct flow only) and 75 percent (direct flow and storage) split when storage exceeds 103,106 AF. The river call during the WWSP operations was set for March 1, 1910, the date of most junior storage decree of the participants. Calculations are also a percentage of a percentage.

Challenges from Kansas

WWSP participants and Colorado, Kansas were not convinced that the program didn't hurt their

entitlements under the Arkansas River Compact and sued Colorado in 1985 for three alleged violations of the Compact, one of which was operation of the WWSP. WWSP participants and Colorado were then placed in the position of both completing a Colorado Water Court decree for the WWSP and simultaneously preparing a defense in the Supreme Court against Kansas' claim. Kansas was concerned with both diminished flows to Compact storage in John Martin Reservoir during the winter and change in timing of return flows for irrigation use, that might mean less return flows to Kansas. The following graph shows....

The decree was completed in Colorado Water Court in 1989 and has successfully operated the program each year since. Kansas' claim was dismissed for being unable to prove injury to the Arkansas River Compact at the time by Special Master's Second report in September 1997. WWSP participants have a reliable storage supply to supplement direct flow irrigation rights, even those participants that previously did not have a storage reservoir.

Roles and responsibilities

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Composition: One member from each participating ditch/entity, (except the Colorado Canal, Lake Henry and Lake Meredith shall together have one vote), which received one collective representative, paragraph 8.

Annual Meetings: The Board is required to meet annually to make decisions necessary for the "equitable distribution of water."

Approval of percentage splits: The Board may approve new percentage split for water allocation, provided there is a unanimous vote, paragraph D.

Approval of transit loss methods: The Board has the authority to approve new methods for calculating transit losses, paragraph N.

Southeastern Colorado Water Conservancy District (SECWCD), serves as the administrative lead for the program.

Leadership role: The general manager of the SECWCD serves as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, paragraph 8, and is specifically designated a non-voting member of the Board.

Pueblo Reservoir Storage: The District permits storage in Pueblo Reservoir when space is available, governed by its own charges, policies, and procedures.

Administrative charges: The Bureau of Reclamation, through the District, assesses monetary charges for Winter Water stored in Pueblo Reservoir.

Robert Banham explained that the WWSP is insulated from spilling, within tier 3 and 5 of the spill levels.

Division Engineer (STATE OF COLORADO) provides technical oversight and regulatory enforcement for the decree.

Engineer advice: The Board of Trustees is required to consult the Division Engineer of Division 2 for engineering advice, paragraph 8.

Record keeping: The Division Engineer is responsible for keeping the official record of all water stored or diverted under the program, paragraph 8D. This item will be earmarked for future follow-through as to notification of the water court, DWR, ARCA and SECWCD due to the terms in the decree.

Inflow monitoring: If winter inflow to John Martin Reservoir conservation pool significantly departs from the 1950-1975 historic patterns, the Division Engineer must advise the Chairman to convene the Board.

Transit Loss and Timing: The Division Engineer approves the transportation loss and transit time figures charged to each applicant.

Evaporation charges: The Division Engineer is tasked with assessing evaporation changes to each storage account.

Release direction: Any Winter Water stored in Pueblo Reservoir that remains unused by May 1 must be released under the direction of the Division Engineer.

Robert Banham read paragraph L, “During low flow at any time during the year, it may be necessary for the Division Engineer to notify the Entity making a Winter Water release that may not be able to identify the reservoir run and little or no credit may be given for the release.”

Rachel explained that this paragraph may be a little antiquated/irrelevant after its writing. DWR is diligent in shepherding the releases and there is no history of a release being made but the water ran dry. Current data with transit loss allows water management to run during more favorable conditions.

Presentation is available in share drive to track resources for the training.

Lonnie Spady reviewed the current Winter Water Program Report dated January 15, 2026. Pueblo Reservoir at 18K, Colorado Canal system just kicked on, John Martin Reservoir at 10k, and 32K for Fort Lyon storage canal/Amity. Holbrook has requested their Winter Water remain in Pueblo Reservoir with 5500 AF available in Pueblo for Holbrook storage.

Currently 64,838.89 AF of Winter Water, last year it was at 76,832 AF. Last year conservation storage was at 70 percent and 30 percent Winter Water. This year it has flipped to 70 Winter Water 30 for conservation storage. Currently exchanges are taking place to Pueblo Reservoir from the ditches. Colorado Springs (exchange from Fountain Creek to Pueblo Reservoir) came to a stipulation known as the “2250” Winter Water stipulation, DWR only uses base flow numbers to calculate the Winter Water flows. Currently there is 18,611 AF credited in Pueblo Reservoir of Winter Water.

The Winter Water split will be addressed at the next meeting. Colorado Canal is measured on lag accounting for Reservoir content, John Martin is calculated based on inflow and split percentage, and Holbrook and Fort Lyon quantified at a diversion on the river, contains transit loss.

Currently we are at the bottom of historic flows, well below 2002 conditions. Looking into what Winter Water was stored during that time will aid for this year. 2025 water year was also low. Colorado basin is also tracking below historic minimums. Trends on Winter Water are more dependent on the previous year or two.

The next meeting will be held in February.

Meeting adjourned at 2:03 p.m.

Margie Medina, Water Resources Administrative Analyst
SECWCD