

Minutes of the San Luis Valley County Commissioners Association Meeting was held on Monday, September 25, 2023 at 9:00 AM in the Alamosa County Commissioners Office, 8900 Independence Way, Alamosa CO 81101.

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Members Present:	Alamosa:	Vern Heersink, County Commissioner Arlan Van Ry, County Commissioner Lori Laske, County Commissioner Roni Wisdom, County Administrator
	Conejos:	Joseph Baroz, County Commissioner-Zoom Carlos Garcia, County Commissioner
	Mineral:	Ramona Weber, County Commissioner Jesse Albright, County Commissioner Scott Lamb, County Commissioner
	Rio Grande:	Gene Glover, County Commissioner Scott Deacon, County Commissioner Tyler Ratzlaff, County Commissioner
	Saguache:	Lynne Thompson, County Commissioner Liza Marron, County Commissioner Tom McCracken, County Commissioner

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Other Attendees: Liz Hensley, Larry Brown, Meagan Smith, Anne Kelly, Tammy Rogers, Megan Bagwell, Erin Minks, Sarah Stoeber, Cathy Garcia, John Weeks, Gregg Goodland

**Invocation** – Sarah Stoeber

**Approval of the Agenda**

Tyler Ratzlaff requested to add the Small Business Development Center to the Agenda after the presentation by the District Attorney budget request. Also added at the end of the agenda will be discussion on Rio Grand Chub and Rio Grande Sucker agreement

**m/s Lori Laske/Gene Glover motion to approve the Amended Agenda**  
**Motion was approved unanimously**

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the June 26 meeting were not available.

**m/s Vern Heersink/ motion to table the Minutes from the June 26 meeting**  
**Motion was approved unanimously**

**Public Comment**

**Megan Smith, Development Director for Care and Share Food Bank** reported she has been a Valley resident for 13 years and is very involved in the community. She explained the differences between Care and Share and La Puente’s Food Bank. The Food Bank distributes food directly to individuals and

families in need, Care and Share distributes food directly to local pantries. Care and Share is in 31 counties in Colorado and the main hub is in Colorado Springs. The local distribution center is in the old Budweiser building. They have distributed about 9 million pounds of food since July. The new distribution center has only been established for two years.

**Erin Minks, Senator Bennet's Office** - If there is anyone at the meeting that would like to ask questions about what a government shutdown may or may not mean to a County, Erin Minks is available today or later.

**12<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Attorney Funding Request** – District Attorney Anne Kelly presented their request. The community asked for a district attorney's office that was substantially and materially different than what existed before. Anne Kelly believes their office has delivered on that promise. It was because the community put their trust in her and her office by giving them the funding that was needed, they were able to accomplish what they've accomplished this year.

They are asking to be funded at the same rate they were funded at last year with a modest increase to be able to address the urgent health and safety needs of the employees in their office and the community members that visit their office. Last year the DA's Office was funded at about 1.7 million from the commissioners. This year they are requesting 1.9 million.

Anne Kelly addressed the major backlog they had coming in last year. She knew the number of cases, but didn't know how much effort it would take or how much manpower it would take to address that. But they accomplished the backlog. They have processed 361 cases that were backlogged in about a year. They were able to do that by employing the assistance of prosecutors across the state. They were also able to assign specific legal assistance to organize the backlog and to push those cases out to their district attorneys to have them review them.

The DA's office changed their system of handling cases and overhauled the law enforcement filing system. They communicated with all 22 of their law enforcement agencies, and now they are all doing it the way that the DA's office designed. They overhauled the process of warrant requests, and they are now 100% more effective and efficient. They also created a part time remote position who reviews all of their warrant requests that are not urgent. The urgent warrants will still go to the prosecutors in the office. What we found, and I'll talk more about this is that by using this part time remote person, law enforcement feels like they can go to the part time person all the time that is be able to respond to them.

The DA's office has six full time and one part time attorney, more than there has ever been in the valley. They would like to hire one more senior level attorney. They have three victim advocates, a diversion specialist, and have added a front desk and subpoena clerk Sara McKnight. They have a chief investigator, and have gotten grant funding to hire a second investigator that will do sex assaults and domestic violence specifically.

It is difficult recruiting new prosecutors to come to the San Luis Valley. Anne Kelly thinks she has spent over 100 hours trying to figure out how to change their recruiting process. She has sent out 400 - 478 personal emails to lawyers across the country, explaining what the DA's office is trying to accomplish, they are offering competitive wages, and encouraging prospects to check out the area. Currently there is one open senior position, and she has four people that she wants to make offers to.

As a condition of employment, Anne Kelly requires all the new hires to participate in weekend training. A couple of the new employees attended trial techniques school put on by the Colorado District Attorney's Council. Megan Bagwell has been recognized as the Office Administrator of the Year for the state of Colorado.

At this time last year, the relationship between the DA's office and law enforcement was fractured. Anne Kelly believes she has changed that, and now has close relationships with every single chief and sheriff in the Valley. They have brought back the All Valley law enforcement monthly meeting. She is also really proud of the relationship she has with the Colorado Bureau of Investigations.

As far as jury trials, they have been busy. There were only four jury trials held in the Valley for the entire three quarters of 2022. The current DA's office has already tried 18 cases. They anticipate trying five to 10 more by the end of this year. They've had no new victim rights as complaints in the past year.

The DA's office is concerned about the safety of the employee and community members who visit the office. Their offices are not secure, they have mice, and water issues. Being over a restaurant and coffee shop is unpleasant and the office is overcrowded. The additional \$50,000 increase in the funding request is to allow the DA's office to be able to pay for rent and utilities in a building they are looking at. They do not have a safe and comfortable area for victims to wait to see an attorney.

If the DA's office asked Alamosa and Conejos Counties to fund them at the same rate as last year, that would be a percentage that would be much higher than the population percentage of the other counties. Every single county in the San Luis Valley gets the same level of service that every other county gets. They are providing the same quality prosecution. They are providing the same number of lawyers per case, and are going to trial at the same rate in Costilla as we are in Alamosa. They are not discriminating based on how much money they get from each county.

**Small Business Development Center** – Liz Hensley spoke on behalf of the SBDC. Last year, she was approached by SBDC for Adams State to become the host of that organization, the previous host was no longer able to do it. There was nobody else who could host it. At the time, it was challenging because Adams State had an interim president. If Adams State did not host it though, it could have gone back to the SBDC office in Pueblo.

Hosting SBDC means all the grant money, everything they pay, funnels through the University. A lot of young people are studying and wanting to get into small business which is a strong backbone to cities and counties. Supporting SBDC allows for free business counseling, and free support for anybody who either wants to create a small business, or who has a small business and needs help to make changes to be steady or become profitable.

Liz Hensley is in the process of hiring a director. Erin Keck, who is at the Chamber for Alamosa is interim director. The job was posted, and they got a few responses, but they realized that the pay was a bit low. They revised the budget to increase the pay. Liz Hensley hopes that they have someone hired by November 1, or the very latest December. A goal would be to have satellite offices in other counties.

The funding request was based on the amount of money Alamosa County provided two years ago and then she used the percentages in the request form to break it down by county. Liz Hensley has quite a

few of the banks who have committed. She thinks that a lot of people realize that the Valley was very close to losing the SBDC. She is asking for a small amount of funding from each county. This group has not supported the SBDC before, but it probably hasn't been asked. The SBDC wants to make it work for everybody. Liz Hensley thinks that also fits Adams State's mission because the school is also for the whole valley and they're here to work with everybody in the valley.

**San Luis Valley RETAC** – Reyna Martinez is the new coordinator. Colorado has 11 regions, emergency medical and trauma services councils. RETAC is authorized by statute to provide and coordinate emergency medical and trauma care. For 2023 – 24, they have created deliverables that will be met in order to comply with the state. That includes data documenting, updating the website, biannual plans and protocols. RETAC is working on rebuilding the relationship with the community, County Commissioners, and EMS agencies. They are also promoting prevention, raising awareness and safety to local schools through the community MCI planning, preparedness coordinating and executing plans for first responder's wellness, emotional, physical trauma support.

They will host an educational symposium on October 7. This is open to any first responders at the Monte Vista Ski High center and it's free in order for them to get that continuous education that they are needing. There are some county responsibilities which the County Commissioners oversee; one of them is the ground ambulance licensing, in addition to supporting first responders. As the RETAC coordinator, Reyna Martinez is here to assist the Commissioners and make sure everyone is complying with the state regulations.

The RETAC board has divided funds equally among the 10 Ambulance agencies in order to award them 7,500 per year, RETAC would like to thank the Commissioners for the IGAs and the MOUs that the Commissioners have signed to assist them.

Julie Ramstetter is the Chair of the RETAC Board. Their job is to make RETAC is informing the County Commissioners of what RETAC is doing and also informing the Commissioners of upcoming changes that are going on at the state level. A proposed change at the state level is that they are looking into making EMS an essential service for the state of Colorado. Currently, a county isn't required to fund an EMS agency. But the state is leaning towards that making that service as an essential service. The state is looking to take over the licensing of EMS agencies. That it would take the responsibility of the law from the local level to the state level. RETAC understands that a lot of communities rely on first responders and volunteer services that are leaving their day to day jobs to come out and respond to an emergency. They want to make sure that they are trying to protect our rural and frontier agencies so that it is not a difficult or expensive process.

RETAC is also assisting with the ground licensing program. RETAC is providing those inspections free of cost to those behavioral transport agencies that are willing to take the behavioral health treatment patients out of the San Luis Valley.

Staffing, recruitment, and retention are important. Making EMS an essential service is recognizing that additional funding is needed to make sure there is personnel on the streets to respond to emergencies. There's been several times in the recent past in Costilla County they've had one crew on and they've had two or three calls. They've been able to send Alamosa or Conejos backup crew to respond to some of those emergencies. It happens several times during the week where ambulance agencies are responding

to other agencies for mutual aid. They're really trying to focus on making sure there is 100% primary coverage in our areas. Lastly, they are working on competitive salaries and how they can better utilize funds to make sure there is the right personnel on the streets.

RETAC is managing four grants, SLV PROM, Police Officer Mental Health Grant, Shield 1078 and SLV Justice League. The SLV Justice League goes into schools and collaborating work with first responders to provide awareness prevention, anti-bullying, and domestic violence with the youth.

**CSU Extension Office** – Larry Brown is the director for the Extension Office. He believes there is a need for positive programs like extension now more than ever, in order to foster healthier kids, healthier people, healthier families, healthier businesses and jobs, and healthier, proud communities. He feels that everyone must fight harder now more than ever to rebuild an Extension office that presents a program in the San Luis Valley. Larry Brown is committed to working hard on other grants and other ways of funding the program to supplement and leverage the Commissioner's allocation to the Extension Office. They have made significant progress in rebuilding the capacity of their staff and rebuilding a more robust educational program

The Extension Office has one agent and one office manager. There are five program coordinators, and one international intern working with them. There are two more positions that funding has been secured for.

Larry Brown wants to stress the progress that has been made is because everyone in this circle has stepped up. The Counties and CSU have increased funding. The Extension Office staff has worked on any sort of a grant that they can get. The San Luis Valley community has stepped up.

The 4H program only has one agent and they need to have two. One way to fund that second agent is through an endowment. He has been working with Karla Shriver from the Outcalt Foundation. They were able to secure a grant from the Kellogg Foundation for \$234,000 over the next three years.

Larry Brown was asked by CSU to serve on a committee to investigate what agricultural classes and majors that should be considered to be offered at Adams State and CSU cooperatively. Leroy Salazar asked him to serve on the ASU agricultural advisory committee. And, Zena Buser from ASU also asked Larry Roberts to be on a committee for a large grant that provides workforce development for internships.

The Extension Office's request is for \$203,000, an increase of \$55,000 from last year. The \$16,725 is the County's portion to fund three base agents. He would like to use \$36,000 for a second office person. The workload on the current office manager has tripled. The remaining funds requested are a year over year projected increase in needs.

**SLV COG** – Sarah Stoeber, Director wanted to thank everyone for the confidence that is placed in her for carrying out the work of the COG. Their office has had a lot of turnover. She outlined the amount of money that has been brought in. Broadband is an important infrastructure issue and they have brought in \$550,000 from the Colorado Trust and staff has devoted about \$100,000 in staff time.

The IGA and 1041 agreement to keep water from being exported from the San Luis Valley has been important to protect the agriculture of the San Luis Valley. The staff has performed another \$100,000 in time toward that. COG is working with DOLA on a feasibility study to work on costs for affordable housing in the San Luis Valley. She expects that to be a multimillion-dollar project as that moves forward.

The San Luis Valley Development Resources Group is applying for funds called Recompete which is workforce development for 22 counties in Colorado. Sarah Stoeber hopes that will bring about \$1.2 million to the San Luis Valley. One thing that could be developed from the funding is CDL training so residents did not have to go out of town for the training. Health care could also be a part of those funds.

The dues collected by the COG goes to administrative costs. They are committed to being more transparent in their finances and want to be more responsible with their expenses.

**La Puente Home, Inc** – Did not attend the meeting.

**United States Forest Service** - Gregg Goodland, Judy Perez, Kris Sexton and Andy Kelher attended the meeting representing the USFS. Gregg Goodland reported that former Rio Grande National Forest Supervisor Dan Dallas has recently taken a new job at the Forest Service's regional office. The interim director is Kris Sexton.

Andy Kelher said that one of the Forest Service's priorities for next year is travel management throughout the forest, but especially around the Conejos Peak area. They are also focused on the Greater American Outdoors act to improve recreation facilities throughout the forest. There were some major roads and reservoirs shut down this year for maintenance. And they did some dam and bridge repair work.

On Friday, the job announcement closed for the forest supervisor position. It should be three – four weeks to certify the resumes they received and then they will start interviews. The region hopes to have a new supervisor selected before Thanksgiving and set to start by the first of the year.

Gregg Goodland presented the Forest Service's plans for Travel Management. The official notice for the start of the program is coming very soon. The plan will include all roads and travel systems in the forest for all activities. They are looking for as much input as they can. This plan will set travel regulations for the next 15-20 years. Consistent information to the forest users is key. They want to make sure that the natural resources are protected and the uses are appropriate.

Judy Perez said the winter management plan describes routes and travel over snow for motorized and non-motorized use. They are working on an over-snow map that will show where people can and can't take motorized vehicles in the winter. By April 30, 2024, the Forest Service has agreed to have initiated the Winter Travel Management Planning process. They will be asking for public input on the map. At the end of their planning process they will issue a draft environmental impact statement, ask for more public input and then issue a final environmental impact statement.

Vern Heersink asked what the definition of winter travel is. Judy said that it is everything that is included in over-snow use. The lynx could add more levels of review for the process. Tom McCracken asked about cloud seeding activities and asked if that could be affecting snowfall. Andy Kelher said that the cloud-seeding issue is handled at the federal level and not at a local level. It was asked if the wolves will impact this plan. Judy Perez said that unless it is a predator control issue, it will not have any impact on the plan.

Tyler Ratzlaff asked if there was more discussion about the 10 County Coalition for the endangered fish species. There was a revised version because Archuleta and Costilla Counties had been added to the agreement. There was also concern about costs going up without a limit on the cost and if there could be a cap. Historically the fees had been really reasonable.

The meeting was adjourned.