

Proposal: SCRO-Led Facilitation of the Management of the Water Access Crisis

**By Nancy Frase
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Background: Water access for refilling cisterns has been shut off, first by Sangre de Cristo Water Services, then more recently by the Fort Garland Water and Sanitation District. This has local residents – within the Ranches and outside of the Ranches – scrambling to find reliable and affordable sources of bulk water. Tensions between governmental agencies and the public have increased. Multiple residents have stepped into leadership roles to find and implement solutions. While solid strides have been made in finding solutions, the disjointed efforts are less effective in the long run than a coordinated effort would be.

8/7/25: During the regular SCRO board meeting, the board voted to immediately retain a water rights attorney.

8/12/25: SCRO retained a water rights attorney to assess long-term solution options.

9/4/25: During the regular SCRO board meeting, the board voted to accept this proposal. Liaisons were assigned.

Discussion

SCRO's attorney has not yet given us the "green light" to engage in any communication with Trinchera Ranch nor with Sangre de Cristo Water Services, Inc. However, our attorney has encouraged us to move into the roles being proposed here.

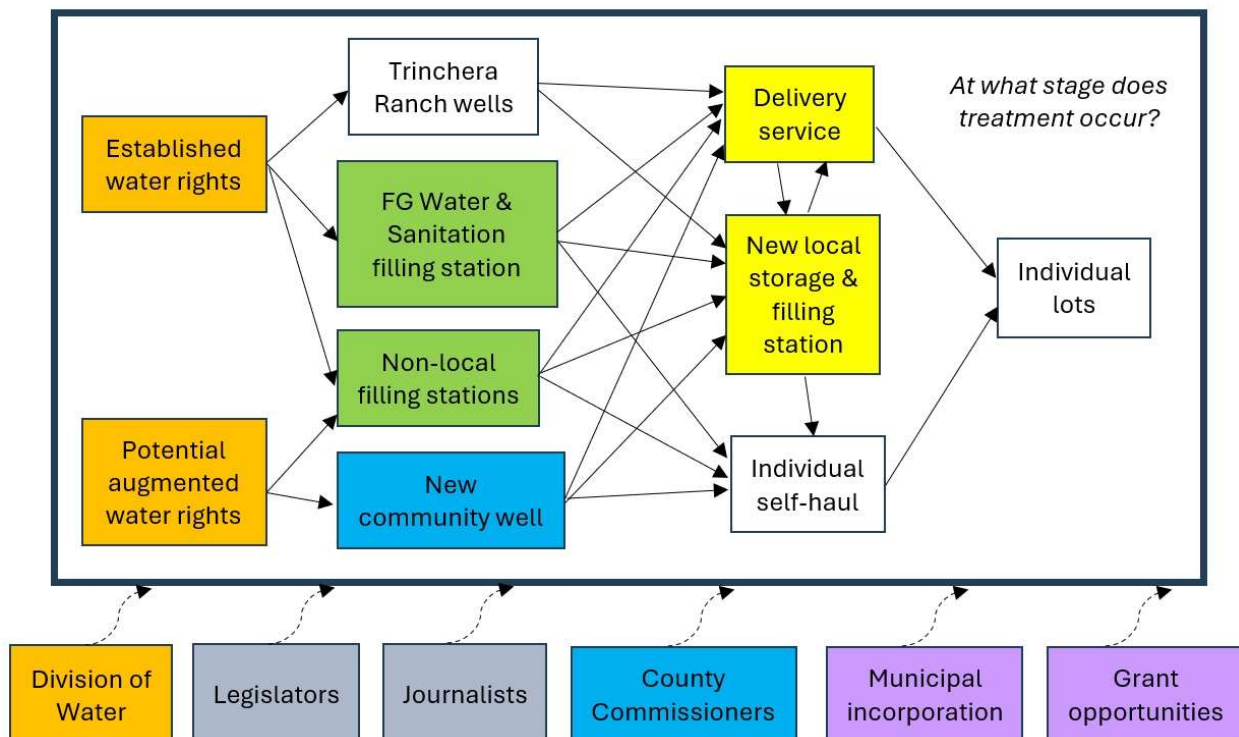
As I prepared this proposal, I kept imagining a huge jigsaw puzzle. Different community members and governmental leaders are each working on different parts of the puzzle. However, they are having trouble knowing what is happening across the "big picture." One person may have the puzzle piece that another person is looking for, but they are unaware of each other's circumstances. In contrast, someone standing back and looking at the entire puzzle might be able to identify the dilemma as well as a solution. I am proposing that SCRO take on the role of the "big picture" facilitator.

The following guidelines are recommended for the implementation of this proposed facilitation effort:

1. Strive for collaboration rather than aggression
2. Seek more to understand rather than to be understood
3. Support existing grassroots efforts
4. Launch new efforts only if necessary
5. All ideas deserve to be heard without interruption or judgement, and deserve to be understood in full
6. All people offering ideas, and the hard work of those people, deserve to be respected and honored
7. Healthy relationships are vital – protect them
8. Be clear about when you are operating as a representative of SCRO and when you are operating as a private citizen; adjust your language accordingly
9. Make no commitments on behalf of SCRO without the approval of SCRO's board obtained during a publicized board meeting
10. Be as transparent as you can be without divulging confidential information

It is not SCRO's place to judge whether any one idea is "good" or "bad," or to determine its chances of success. Rather, SCRO's responsibility would be to learn enough about everyone's ideas, knowledge, and experiences to figure out how the puzzle pieces might go together. Bottom line, our goal would be to piece together at least one – hopefully multiple – paths from the left edge of the diagram (below) to the right edge of the diagram. There will likely be short-term solutions, mid-term solutions, and long-term solutions. Furthermore, the viability of various potential solutions will be influenced by a multitude of public-centric entities, many of which are shown along the bottom of the diagram.

Potential Routes for Creating Access to Water



If each board member takes responsibility for a portion of the effort, the board can effectively facilitate the "big picture" as a team. I am proposing that each board member take on the role of a liaison, with each liaison (board member) handling one category of tasks (defined below). I am also proposing that, as SCRO president, my responsibility would be to coordinate the effort across the team of liaisons:

"Water rights" liaison (orange boxes) – Board Member Scott Cessac:

- Identify the existing water rights (ground & surface) that currently supply (or could supply) Trinchera Ranch wells, Fort Garland Water & Sanitation District (FGWSD), and non-local filling stations
- Attempt to identify any existing water rights (ground & surface) that could be reallocated (via an updated augmentation plan) to supply FGWSD, non-local filling stations, or a new community well

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of augmentation plans, in general
- Actively participate in a meeting scheduled and led by Board Member Frase with key players in the Division of Water Resources (DWR)
- After the meeting, establish and maintain a healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationship with the DWR; facilitate regular two-way communication with the DWR
- Keep Board Member Frase up to date on any developments on these fronts
- Provide regular reports on these fronts at the monthly SCRO board meetings

“Filling stations” liaison (green boxes) – Board Member Steve Navratil:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the functions and responsibilities of the Fort Garland Water & Sanitation District, and the resources available to them
- Actively participate in a meeting scheduled and led by Board Member Frase with key players at FGWSD
- After the meeting, establish and maintain a healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationship with FGWSD; facilitate regular two-way communication with FGWSD
- Attend FGWSD meetings and provide regular reports on those meetings to SCRO’s board
- Develop and maintain healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationships with community members who have already been working to establish access to non-local filling stations; develop a comprehensive understanding of whatever information they are willing to share
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of: what non-local filling stations exist, which ones are currently selling bulk water, which ones have the option of selling bulk water but are not doing so, and the parameters and limitations associated with each of those stations
- Develop and maintain healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationships with the various non-local filling stations, including the ones who are not currently selling bulk water
- Keep Board Member Frase up to date on any developments on these fronts
- Provide regular reports on these fronts at the monthly SCRO board meetings

“Costilla County” liaison (blue boxes) – Board Member Eric Averett:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the functions and responsibilities of the Costilla County Board of Commissioners (CCBC) related to access to water, and the resources available to them
- Actively participate in a meeting scheduled and led by Board Member Frase with key players of the CCBC
- After the meeting, establish and maintain a healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationship with the CCBC; facilitate regular two-way communication with the CCBC
- Attend CCBC meetings and provide regular reports on those meetings to SCRO’s board
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the requirements for the potential development of a community well (technical, legal, fiscal, etc.)
- Identify potential locations for a new community well and the “pros” and “cons” of each
- Keep Board Member Frase up to date on any developments on these fronts
- Provide regular reports on these fronts at the monthly SCRO board meetings

“Public relations” liaison (gray boxes) – Board Member Jo Way:

- Develop and maintain healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationships with regional journalists and news outlets
- Work with the board to draft press releases
- Once the press releases are approved by the board, distribute them to the media
- Develop and maintain healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationships with regional legislators and other community leaders

- Leverage those relationships to open channels of communication with reluctant stakeholders and to enhance access to resources
- Keep Board Member Frase up to date on any developments on these fronts
- Provide regular reports on these fronts at the monthly SCRO board meetings

“Storage & transportation” liaison (yellow boxes) – Board Member Mara Rodriguez-Walters:

- Develop and maintain healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationships with community members who have already been working to establish the delivery and/or storage of water; develop a comprehensive understanding of whatever information they are willing to share
- Identify existing and potential commercial delivery services (excluding Sangre de Cristo Water Services, Inc. because our attorney has not yet given us a “green light” to engage in discussions with them)
- Develop and maintain healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationships with those delivery services without “stepping on the toes” of the community members identified above
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the requirements for establishing regular deliveries either to a central location near Ft Garland or to individual lots (i.e., what are the operating parameters of the various delivery services)
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the requirements for establishing a new local storage and filling station (technical, legal, fiscal, etc.)
- Identify potential locations for a new local storage & filling station
- Keep Board Member Frase up to date on any developments on these fronts
- Provide regular reports on these fronts at the monthly SCRO board meetings

“Strategic planning” liaison (purple boxes) – Board Member Mike Powell:

- Develop and maintain healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationships with community members who are striving to incorporate our local area into a municipality; develop a comprehensive understanding of whatever information they are willing to share
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the requirements for municipal incorporation
- Research what is involved in establishing and operating a 501(c)(3) and how the 501(c)(3) might legally fund projects identified and spearheaded by SCRO (which currently is a 501(c)(4) corporation)
- Develop and maintain healthy (and hopefully friendly) relationships with community members who are exploring grant opportunities for community projects related to water, wildfire mitigation, emergency services, etc.; develop a comprehensive understanding of whatever information they are willing to share
- Identify grant sources that would be relevant to our community
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of grant writing/implementation so that you possess the skills needed to liaison with a grant writer and/or program manager (should we hire one)
- Keep Board Member Frase up to date on any developments on these fronts
- Provide regular reports on these fronts at the monthly SCRO board meetings