

**Water Supply Reserve Account – Grant and Loan Program
Water Activity Summary Sheet
Agenda Item 10.e**

Applicant: Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT)

Water Activity Name: Rio Grande Initiative: North Rio Grande Ranch Conservation Easement

Water Activity Purpose: Nonstructural Water Project

County: Alamosa

Drainage Basin: Rio Grande

Water Source: Rio Grande

Amount Requested: \$70,000

Source of Funds: \$55,000 (Statewide Account) and \$15,000 (Basin Account)

Matching Funds: \$15,000 cash (Basin Account), \$200,000 (GOCO grant pending), \$245,000 (approximate value of donated portion of conservation easement) Total = 836% match for Statewide Account request

Staff Recommendation
Staff recommends approval of up to \$15,000 from the Rio Grande Basin Account and \$55,000 from the Statewide Account to assist in the funding of the Rio Grande Initiative: North Rio Grande Ranch Conservation Easement contingent upon the resolution of the issues and additional needs identified in this summary.

Water Activity Summary:

The requested funds will be used to providing matching funds toward a bargain-sale acquisition of a conservation easement on an important 320-acre Rio Grande river corridor ranch in Alamosa County, including securing the senior water rights to the property. It is a continuation of the successful *Rio Grande Initiative*, which benefits *both* consumptive and non-consumptive water needs in the Rio Grande Basin. As an element of an ongoing, collaborative, community-based project, this conservation opportunity will directly protect senior surface water rights in order to help sustain the historic water use patterns along the Rio Grande river corridor by linking the water rights to the land through a permanent conservation easement. This is accomplished through a willing-seller/willing-buyer process for a voluntary conservation easement, which is purchased through a bargain sale and includes a substantial charitable donation of value (approximately 50%) by the landowner.

Specific benefits of the project include:

- Preserving agriculture and irrigation on 260 – 320 acres with 300 to 400 acre-feet of water
- Protecting Wildlife Habitat on irrigated lands, riparian corridor and 100 acres of designated wetlands
- Preserving historic water use patterns by maintaining return flows
- Preserving floodplain for flood mitigation and public safety

Discussion:

The *Rio Grande Initiative's* direct protection of lands within the floodplain and senior surface water rights addresses both consumptive and non-consumptive needs, and it benefits multiple entities and interests in the Rio Grande Basin and on behalf of the State. The project will help sustain agricultural

productivity in the basin. It will also preserve lands within the floodplain that directly contribute to healthy wildlife populations and flood mitigation. Preserving floodplains in an undeveloped state is a sound strategy for avoiding property damage and loss of life from large flood events. This project will preserve open space in the floodplain upstream of the Town of Alamosa. Alamosa is at risk to flood damage during a flood event, and future development in the river corridor could exacerbate this risk. Floodplains are attractive to developers because of the amenities and unique natural features they offer. Alternatively, floodplain preservation continues to provide wildlife habitat, flood attenuation, water quality benefits, ground water storage, and agricultural resources.

The funds requested in this application will be for the direct purchase of the conservation easement. Other grant funding will be used for implementation costs including appraisal, baseline condition report, phase I environmental assessment, legal expenses, title work, closing, and stewardship endowment.

Issues/Additional Needs:

The applicant should include a detailed description of their long term monitoring methodology that ensures compliance with the terms and conditions of the easement.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of up to \$15,000 from the Rio Grande Basin Account and \$55,000 from the Statewide Account to assist in the funding of the Rio Grande Initiative: North Rio Grande Ranch Conservation Easement contingent upon the resolution of the issues and additional needs identified in this summary.

All products, data and information developed as a result of this grant must be provided to the CWCB in hard copy and electronic format as part of the project documentation. This information will in turn be made widely available to Basin Roundtables and the general public and will help promote the development of a common technical platform.

In accordance with the revised WSRA Criteria and Guidelines, staff would like to highlight additional reporting and final deliverable requirements. The specific requirements are provided below.

Reporting: The applicant shall provide the CWCB a progress report every 6 months, beginning from the date of the executed contract. The progress report shall describe the completion or partial completion of the tasks identified in the scope of work including a description of any major issues that have occurred and any corrective action taken to address these issues.

Final Deliverable: At completion of the project, the applicant shall provide the CWCB a final report that summarizes the project and documents how the project was completed. This report may contain photographs, summaries of meetings and engineering reports/designs.

Engineering: All engineering work (as defined in the Engineers Practice Act (§12-25-102(10) C.R.S.)) performed under this grant shall be performed by or under the responsible charge of professional engineer licensed by the State of Colorado to practice Engineering.