

Rio Grande Inter-Basin Roundtable
c/o San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District
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January 19, 2011

Mr. Michael King, Executive Director
Colorado Department of Natural Resources

Mr. Eric Hecox, Manager, Office of Interbasin Compact Negotiations
Colorado Department of Natural Resources

Mr. Todd Doherty, Intrastate Water Management & Development
Colorado Water Conservation Board

Reference: Rio Grande Initiative – North Rio Grande Ranch Conservation Easement

Gentlemen:

The Rio Grande Inter-Basin Roundtable (R.G.R.T) has determined that the single, most critical water issue confronting the Rio Grande Basin is the current unsustainable management of surface and ground water. The R.G.R.T. has made the decision that water activities that address this issue be favorably considered for funding from the Water Supply Reserve Account, SB 2005 -179 (WSRA Funds), providing the proposed water activities meet the SWSI findings for the Basin and the CWCB & IBCC Criteria and Guidelines for funding.

Total request by the Rio Grande Headwater Land Trust (RiGHT) for the *Rio Grande Initiative – North Rio Grande Ranch Conservation Easement* (the Project) is \$70,000.00. Of this amount, the R.G.R.T. is requesting authorization to distribute WSRA Funds pursuant to SB 2005 -179 of Rio Grande Basin Funds of \$15,000.00 (21%) and Statewide Funds of \$55,000.00 (79%). These funds will be used by the applicant as matching funds for a GOCO Open Space grant whose application will be submitted in February 2011 for approximately \$200,000 .00, together with the donation of conservation value from the participating landowner of approximately \$230,000.00 and additional implementation costs paid by the landowner of approximately \$15,000.00. (Note that final value of the conservation easement is determined by the appraisal process, subject to GOCO review and submitted to the Colorado Department. of Revenue and Division of Real Estate).

At the regular R.G.R.T meeting on January 8, 2011, members voted unanimously to request funding from SB 2005 - 179 – Rio Grande Basin Funds and Statewide Funds for:

PROJECT AND AMOUNT REQUESTED	SOURCE SB 179
<u>RIO GRANDE INITIATIVE – NORTH RIO GRANDE RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT</u>	BASIN \$15,000.00
<u>RIO GRANDE INITIATIVE – NORTH RIO GRANDE RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT</u>	STATEWIDE \$55,000.00

The *Rio Grande Initiative* is an important contributor to the goal of the Rio Grande Interbasin Round Table to address the unsustainable water management practices in the Basin *to achieve water sustainability for the Basin*. By RiGHT conserving key parcels of land and their senior surface rights on the Rio Grande it is assisting in:

- Sustaining historic water flows in a manner that supports the consumptive needs for agriculture;
- Assists the Colorado Division Engineer in administering the waters of the river and meeting Colorado's Rio Grande Compact obligations;
- Assists the Rio Grande Water Conservation District in its work with Groundwater Subdistricts to restore the Basin's aquifers in the San Luis Valley;
- Assists in sustaining a range of important non-consumptive attributes including fisheries and wildlife habitat (including that of endangered species), recreational opportunities, a functioning flood plain, and the scenic beauty of the river corridor.

Conservation easements along the Rio Grande, have presented opportunities for restoration, ecological enhancement, and management improvements far into the future. If these same lands were to be subdivided and developed into residential developments, or if the associated water rights were separated from these key riparian areas, many community benefits and future opportunities will be lost. The unfortunate results of poorly planned river corridor development and the effects of dewatered riparian areas can be seen across Colorado. The various Rio Grande communities are working together to avert such effects.

Begun in 2007, RiGHT's *Rio Grande Initiative* is a collaborative project to protect land and water along the Rio Grande corridor. The *Initiative* has a proven track record of success, including the successful completion of a prior WSRA award. The landscape scale conservation effort has involved many of the Roundtable members in the work of RiGHT, with the key partners including The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited. In addition to the CWCB's prior WSRA award of \$1.5 million RiGHT has received substantial funding from Great Outdoors Colorado, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, local counties, and many private foundations and supporters. Across the San Luis Valley, RiGHT and its partners have protected key water resources along with working agricultural lands, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. This has been accomplished in close collaboration with various water, wildlife and land management agencies, and farmers and ranchers.

The *Rio Grande Initiative* has received strong support from the Rio Grande Interbasin Round Table since its initial presentation at the February 2007 meeting when it provided a letter of support that was submitted (along with support letters from the county commissions of Mineral, Rio Grande, Alamosa and Conejos Counties, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District and others), for RiGHT's Legacy Grant to Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund (GOCO) in March 2007. RiGHT received the single largest GOCO Legacy Grant award at that time, presented by Governor Ritter in December 2007, in the amount of \$7.385 million, \$2.385 million of which was from the Colorado Division of Wildlife's (CDOW) portion of GOCO funds. As President of the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, the late Ray Wright said on many occasions, "The Rio Grande Initiative may well be the most important thing we can do in the Rio Grande basin for water sustainability."

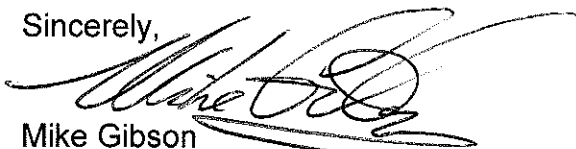
The deliverable for the Project will include the placement of a conservation easement on some 300 acres that are integral to the integrity of the Rio Grande corridor, and the long term benefits associated with preservation of current land and water uses.

Once again, I wish to emphasize that there is a deep-rooted support for the *Rio Grande Initiative*, from all sectors in the R.G.R.T., from all four counties in the San Luis Valley, from representatives of the area's water districts and water users associations, as well as from the farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, and landowners.

On behalf of the R.G.R.T. members, we appreciate the Board's consideration of this request and urge your support to the fullest extent possible. Enclosed are the application and supporting materials for the Project. If you require additional information, please notify me accordingly.

The R.G.R.T. appreciates the support of the Department of Natural Resources, the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Interbasin Compact Commission in assisting in meeting the needs of all users of Colorado's water and in fostering intrabasin and interbasin communications and discussions. We believe that the above project will assist in this effort.

Sincerely,



Mike Gibson
Chair, Rio Grande Interbasin Roundtable

Enclosures (2)

cc: Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust