

**Conserving Our
Land, Water & Way of Life in
Colorado's Rio Grande Basin,
The San Luis Valley**



October 26, 2010

Colorado Water Conservation Board
Colorado Healthy Rivers Fund
Attn: Chris Sturm
1313 Sherman St., Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203

Re: OE PDA 09000000080 / Line 91843000000

Dear Mr. Sturm:

The Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) is incredibly honored to have received a watershed tax check off grant in the amount of \$15,000.00 to develop and education and outreach program to develop interest in conservation of land. The grant agreement (purchase order) is dated March 13, 2009. Included in this report are the history of the grant and project along with the specific objectives, results, lessons learned and future efforts.

This grant supported the education and outreach components of RiGHT's "*Rio Grande Initiative*", our ambitious program to advance conservation along the Rio Grande river in Colorado. Our goal was to increase the pace of conservation, which we have accomplished. From 1986 to 2006 there were 6,000 acres along the river conserved. Since the start of the *Initiative* in 2007 we have protected an additional 8,000 acres in the last three years (worth a conservation value of over \$25 million!). Thus, we have effectively doubled the pace of conservation. Together with protection efforts from other organizations and governmental entities, there are now more than 19,000 acres of private land conserved along the Rio Grande to date, but there is more work to be done.

In acknowledgement of our work, in a 2009 press release, Governor Ritter said, "*The Rio Grande River is truly one of our state's most important national treasures. Its waters sustain productive farms and ranches that were founded before Colorado became a state, and wildlife thrive along its impressive length. All Coloradans should be heartened to know that in these difficult economic times, creative people came together to protect the land, water and wildlife, that are the heart and soul of one of our iconic landscapes.*"

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If you have any questions about this report, please don't hesitate to contact me at (719) 657-0800.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Butler", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Nancy Butler
Executive Director

Specifically associated with this grant were the following objective and associated results:

Education & Outreach:

Goal: The goal of RiGHT's education and outreach program is to increase knowledge of conservation easements and of our work in general. We will accomplish this goal by holding a variety of workshops, meetings, and presentations.

Results: RiGHT held two workshops and facilitated numerous presentations about our work here in the Rio Grande watershed. Both workshops were well attended. Our first workshop in May of 2010 was attended by 20 people and directly resulted a landowner contact who we are now working on a conservation easement with along the Rio Grande river directly across from the Alamosa National Wildlife Refuge (in Alamosa County).

Our second, more recent workshop was held in September 2010 and was attended by 30 people. Attendees including a wide variety of landowners, public officials (representatives from both Senator Bennets and Representative Salazar's offices attended), professional service providers (i.e. two title company staff attended) and two professors of Real Estate at Adams State College. The opportunity to educate our public officials and professors at a state run institution was a great added benefit for us. As a result, one of the professors recently invited us to present to his college class, which myself and my colleague, Aaron Derwingson, did last week. Thus our efforts are paying dividends in educating the next generation of landowners.

In addition to these two workshops, RiGHT made numerous other presentations to community groups, including small presentations to local Rotary Clubs and a major presentation to the Colorado Field Institute (CFI). CFI's mission is "To expand stewardship of the natural and cultural resources of the San Luis Valley, while increasing sustainable economic development in the region". This presentation directly resulted in another landowner contact who we are now also working with on a conservation easement along the Conejos River in Conejos County. The Conejos River is the Rio

Grande's largest tributary in Colorado and as such, is part of our overall *Rio Grande Initiative*.

These two conservation easements, which are expected to be completed in 2011, will result in over 400 acres of privately conserved lands with conservation values of over \$700,000. That's leveraging the \$15,000 contribution from this grant at a level of 46 to 1, which hopefully makes for a good return on your investment in the *Initiative*!

However, more importantly, these two specific easements will keep important wetland habitat intact, will buffer the rivers and other public land and will provide scenic views for the people of Colorado and our tourism industry.

Additionally, we used these funds to purchase a power point projector and to help develop our outreach materials, including: a new and updated landowner packet, and updated brochure, information posters describing the land trust and the *Rio Grande Initiative* and a magnet. The projector and these materials cumulatively help tell our story and keep the message of what we do, and why it matters in front of people.

Lessons Learned and Future Efforts: When we started this project, we often just had one message, which was mostly about numbers and acres, because that is the language we speak and the language we most often speak with our funders and donors. However, this process taught us to diversify our message to our audience, for example, when speaking with a Rotary Club, whose members may not own private land, nor necessarily understand conservation easements, we modified our message to be more about why conservation matters to them, so all people can feel a connection to our work and its importance. As mentioned above in the introductory paragraphs, there is more work to be done. Currently we are working on more than 2,000 acres of conservation easements (including the two projects mentioned above) and we are constantly doing project development. Additionally, we are expanding our outreach program to doing more activities on the land, such as photography workshops and ranch tours.

Newsletters:

Goal: Create newsletters (two print and four e-newsletters) to help increase the visibility of our projects

Results: While our goal was to create two print and four e-newsletters, we ended up producing two newsletters and one annual report that got mailed out that had e-versions of them. Funding from this grant helped us produce beautiful color materials that reached a wide variety of audiences. Before this grant, we had been lax about getting our newsletters out on a consistent basis. With this grant we were able to establish a look and design and consistency to our work, which we expect to carry forward.

Lessons Learned and Future Efforts: In order to have e-newsletters, you really need to have a good e-system in place, which includes a well developed e-mail list of who should get newsletters electronically. We determined that we did not have our list developed

enough to be effective, but creating that list is definitely on our horizon, with the goal of having both print and electronic information be compelling. One of the new trends we are following in development is e-newsletters and social networking. We have been attending numerous webinars on this subject so we can continue to develop and execute our outreach goals in ways that keep up and match what type of information people want to receive and how they want to receive it.