



COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

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September 17, 2012

Ms. Linda Bassi
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203

SUBJ: Valdez Ditch Acquisition/Donation – Alamosa River

Dear Linda:

The following is Colorado Parks and Wildlife's (CPW) analysis and recommendation regarding the possible acquisition/donation of 0.5 cfs of the Valdez Ditch water right for instream flow purposes on the Alamosa River near the town of Capulin, Colorado.

General Information

The Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) recently asked CPW to evaluate the benefits and possible impacts associated with accepting the proposed donation of the Valdez Ditch water right to the natural environment of the Alamosa River. The CWCB currently does not hold an instream flow water right on the Alamosa River downstream of Terrace Reservoir. The Alamosa River is a tributary of the Rio Grande in Conejos County near Capulin, Colorado (approximately 7 miles south of Alamosa, Colorado).

Biological Survey Data

The former Division of Wildlife conducted field surveys of the fishery resources on the Alamosa River and has found that the fishery is severely impacted by both heavy metals contamination and extremely low streamflows during the winter months. The Alamosa River is classified as a large river (between 60 and 90 feet of bankfull width); habitat surveys have indicated that the Alamosa River could support a self-sustaining fishery if, in the future, current water quality and wintertime streamflows were to improve.

Field Data Collection

The R2CROSS data that we have on file was collected downstream of Terrace Reservoir and upstream of all of the major ditches that divert water from the Alamosa River during the irrigation season. This R2CROSS data indicates that instream flows of 45 cfs during the summer months and 15 cfs during the winter months would be necessary to preserve and improve the natural environment to a reasonable degree. These flow levels have been used as target flows or goals for re-establishment of a fishery in the Alamosa River near Capulin; in the restoration reach, a wintertime flow goal of 10 cfs has been identified in master planning documents for the Alamosa River Restoration Project. However, it is

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important to note that these flow recommendations are based on current, pre-restoration physical data collected to date and have not been thoroughly analyzed in light of water availability constraints.

Water Right Donation Analysis


CPW is of the understanding that the 0.5 cfs of the Valdez Ditch that is the subject of the proposed acquisition has been historically used to irrigate approximately 17 acres of land near Capulin. As was the case with previous water right acquisitions to support restoration efforts on the Alamosa River, CPW is supportive of the concept of drying up the irrigated lands and storing the yield (approximately 145 acre-feet) from the Valdez Ditch in Terrace Reservoir for release during the late summer, fall and early winter months to address the historic low flow issues (above and below the Valdez Ditch point of diversion) on the Alamosa River. CPW realizes that this is an incremental process in an effort to meet the target flow levels for the winter months and we are committed to continued work with CWCB staff and the Alamosa River stakeholders into the future. The acquisition of the Valdez Ditch water right, when added to the prior acquisition of the Gabino Gallegos Ditch in 2010, is only a step along the way toward restoration of the Alamosa River fishery.

CPW Recommendation

Based on the above analysis, CPW recommends that the CWCB accept the donation of water rights associated with the Valdez Ditch to preserve and improve the natural environment of the Alamosa River. Accepting this senior water right will potentially increase the amount of time each year that the Alamosa River has sufficient streamflows to support and maintain a fishery. Further, accepting this water and managing it for late summer, fall and early winter streamflow maintenance will also extend the amount of flowing stream habitat (reach length) over what has occurred historically. As stated above, the incremental nature of this restoration project dictates to us the fact that we are not done with the water acquisition activities on the Alamosa River, but the Valdez Ditch acquisition is an important step towards recovery.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me at 303-291-7260.

Sincerely,



Jay W. Skinner
Water Resources Unit manager
Colorado Parks and Wildlife

CC: John Alves, Southwest Region Senior Aquatic Biologist