

Rio Grande Inter-Basin Roundtable
c/o San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District
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Mr. Michael King, Executive Director
Colorado Department of Natural Resources

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

Reference: THE *RIO GRANDE INITIATIVE'S HAYWOOD RANCH
CONSERVATION PROJECT*

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 (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.

This letter is to express the strong support of the Rio Grande Inter-Basin Round Table for the accompanying application for funding from the Water Supply Reserve Account's (WSRA) Basin and State-wide funds for the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust's (RiGHT) application for the *Rio Grande Initiative's Haywood Ranch Conservation Project*.

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 and this landscape scale conservation effort has involved many of the Rio Grande Roundtable and key partners including The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited. With prior WSRA awards of \$1.57 million to the *Rio Grande Initiative*, along with substantial matching funds and landowner contributions have helped protect six working ranches along the Rio Grande. To date, over 22,000 acres and 39 river miles have been protected with \$36 million of conservation value. Across the San Luis Valley, RiGHT and its partners have protected key water resources along with vital wetlands and wildlife habitat on working agricultural lands. They have a history of close collaboration with the local various water, wildlife and land management agencies and districts as well as farmers and ranchers.

The *Rio Grande Initiative* is an important contributor to the Rio Grande Inter-Basin Roundtable's core purpose: to achieve water sustainability for the Rio Grande Basin. By conserving key parcels and their senior surface rights on the Rio Grande, this effort is helping the State sustain and meet important non-consumptive attributes and well as consumptive needs by:

- Assisting the Division Engineer in administering the waters of the Rio Grande and meeting Colorado's compact obligations;
- Assisting the Colorado Parks and Wildlife and the US Fish and Wildlife Service in sustaining key wildlife habitat for the many species that depend upon the river corridor, including the federally endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, big and small game, waterfowl and many migrating and breeding bird species, and important fisheries;
- Assisting in maintaining flood plain functions by keeping open lands along the river intact and undeveloped;
- Assisting the Rio Grande Water Conservation District in its work to restore our area's aquifers; and,
- Helping secure and sustain river flows for recreational opportunities and preserving the scenic beauty of the river's corridors.

The application of conservation easements provides opportunities for restoration, ecological enhancement, and land management improvements on the subject properties. If these same lands were to be subdivided and developed into residential developments, or if the associated water rights are separated from these key riparian areas, many community benefits and future opportunities will be lost.

The current application for the *Haywood Ranch Conservation Project* was discussed at both the June 12 and July 10, 2012 Roundtable Meetings.

At the regular July 10, 2012 meeting of the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable members unanimously to include \$25,000 of the Rio Grande Basin Funds and to request \$400,000 of Statewide funds for the *Rio Grande Initiative Haywood Ranch Conservation Project*. It should be noted that the motion to approve the funding also asked the applicants to adjust their request proportionally, should the appraised values be lower than their estimates in this request. That was acceptable to the applicants.

One of the major attributes of the Haywood Ranch is that it holds over 30% of the # 1 water right on the Rio Grande in Colorado, the Silva Ditch. Together with the neighboring ranch that is already conserved and its share of that same water right, this Project would protect a majority of the water in that # 1 priority. This Project also has letters of support from the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, the Rio Grande Water Users Association, District 3 Engineer, Colorado Division of Water Resources, Colorado Senator Gail Schwartz, Colorado Representative Ed Vigil, and the City of Monte Vista, located down-river from the Haywood Ranch.

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