

**Water Supply Reserve Account – Grant and Loan Program
Water Activity Summary Sheet
Agenda Item 14.g**

Applicant: Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association

Water Activity Name: Culebra Watershed Vallejos Ditch Headgate Replacement

Water Activity Purpose: Structural consumptive project

County: Costilla

River Basin: Rio Grande

Water Source: Vallejos Creek

Amount Requested: \$90,000 (Statewide Account); \$10,000 (Rio Grande Basin Account)

Matching Funds: \$1,200 (Applicant), \$2,400 (Costilla County Conservancy District), \$10,600 (NRCS), \$1,900 In-Kind (Vallejos Ditch)

Staff Recommendation
Staff recommends approval of up to \$10,000 from the Rio Grande Basin Account and \$90,000 from the Statewide Account to help complete Culebra Watershed Vallejos Ditch Headgate Replacement Project.

Water Activity Summary:

The Sangre de Cristo Acequia Association (SCAA), previously known as the Colorado Acequia Association, was established by the Costilla County Conservancy District (CCCD) to serve the needs of historic acequias in the Culebra River watershed of the southern San Luis Valley. The SCAA seeks to preserve the acequia agricultural lifestyle; improve the quality of the environment; keep water tied to the land, and serve as an umbrella organization for local irrigators. The SCAA includes a community of 228 families, most of whom are fifth and sixth generation landowners, organized into 64 separate acequia groups that irrigate about 23,000 acres. It also provides fiscal, organizational, legal, and technical resources which are otherwise not available to many of the watershed's independent ditch associations and acequias.

Of the 83 acequias currently in operation in Water District 24 of Division 3, the Vallejos Ditch Association is one of the earliest, established in 1854 with priority #5. The current structure has suffered from high maintenance costs, reduced functionality, and repeated flood events, thus making it a very high priority project.

The proposed project seeks to replace the existing headgate and diversion structure on Vallejos Creek, which feeds both the north and south irrigation laterals of the Vallejos system. The South lateral is supplied through a drop structure and corrugated metal pipe located under the main structure. The concrete structure has deteriorated, with the walls cracked and crumbling. In high flows the headgate fails to divert excess water back to the natural stream channel, causing flooding of the neighboring residential areas. The crumbled structure leaks and the water control gates are almost inoperable. At almost 50 years old, the diversion structure has surpassed its effective service life. The Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) has determined that this diversion is beyond repair and must be replaced.

In addition to the diversion structure, there are associated riparian and water quality issues. The banks of Vallejos Creek upstream and downstream of the diversion are deteriorated due to continual seepage and vegetative overgrowth, exacerbating the sedimentation and erosion problems identified throughout the Culebra watershed. Loss of stability has also caused the targeted section of the Vallejos Ditch to lose 70% of its carrying capacity.

Threshold and Evaluation Criteria

The application meets all four Threshold Criteria.

The application articulates how the project meets the Evaluation Criteria as summarized below:

Tier 1: Promoting Collaboration/Cooperation & Meeting Water Management Goals & Identified Needs:

The SCAA is an organization built on uniting and supporting the interests of acequia irrigators in the Culebra watershed. This project implements some of the consumptive and nonconsumptive needs identified in SCAA's Culebra watershed plan. The Vallejos Ditch Association and SCAA have collaborated to collect data, maps, and numerous historical documents from the Division of Water Resources, Costilla County's Land Use Planner, and County Commissioners. Key guidance and preliminary plans were also provided by the San Luis field office of NRCS, with several of their staff attending numerous meetings. The watershed plan was a collaboration of The Rural Community Assistance Corporation, the Colorado Watershed Network, Riverwatch, the Costilla County Commission, and the SLV GIS/GPS Authority, and was funded in part with two EPA grants (\$10,000 and \$50,000) and \$3,500 from the Costilla County Water Conservancy District. Technical support toward implementation was provided over almost two years by CDPHE. The proposed project seeks to address important identified needs in the Rio Grande Basin.

Tier 2: Facilitating Water Activity Implementation:

The Vallejos Ditch Association has insufficient funds to undertake the replacement of the diversion structure, and also lacks the organizational requirements to qualify for a loan or to apply for grant funds directly, because it is not incorporated, does not have a Tax ID number, and does not have the required insurance to apply. For this reason the SCAA has stepped forward, in keeping with its mission, to satisfy the eligibility requirements and to provide the needed infrastructure and administration to fulfill the terms of this proposal. The SCAA has contributed what it can and has requested assistance from the Costilla Water Conservancy District, but, needs additional funding as requested. This grant is essential to replace the headgate on Vallejos Creek.

Tier 3: The Water Activity Addresses Issues of Statewide Value and Maximizes Benefits:

With 1,316 acres irrigated by the Vallejos Ditch Association, the replacement of the diversion structure restores important existing infrastructure to optimize the beneficial use of important senior agricultural water rights. SCAA's sponsorship, fiscal agency, and administration brings a much larger perspective to this project. The involvement of NRCS brings the benefit of past studies and watershed analyses along with a watershed-wide perspective. SCAA's administration and collaborative involvement with multiple acequias and ditches fosters a united approach to solving problems. In July 2008, the CWCB supported the SCAA watershed plan, providing \$5,000 to construct and install trash racks on major acequias to reduce sediment buildup. The SCAA anticipates fulfilling similar proposals for other unincorporated ditches and acequias in the future, with the assistance of NRCS, as much work remains to be done throughout the Culebra Watershed.

Discussion:

As identified in the SWSI findings, small agricultural water users often lack the financial ability to adequately address infrastructure needs without financial aid. The proposed project does not possess the financial resources to make the required improvements to fully utilize its existing water rights. In addition, the SWSI Management Objectives, of the SWSI Phase II Report: Addressing the Water Supply Gap Technical Roundtable, include to "sustainably meet agricultural demands." That management objective is directly met through this activity. The proposed project effectively meets the objectives of HB 1177 and the consumptive needs of the Rio Grande Basin by rehabilitating existing infrastructure to preserve agricultural water use through a collaborative and regional approach.

Issues/Additional Needs:

No issues or additional needs have been identified.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of up to \$10,000 from the Rio Grande Basin Account and \$90,000 from the Statewide Account to help complete Culebra Watershed Vallejos Ditch Headgate Replacement Project.

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 and Final Deliverable: 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. 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.

Location Map: