



WESTERN RIVERS CONSERVANCY

Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman, Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

July 15, 2014

Dear Members of the Board,

I write today on behalf of Western Rivers Conservancy, the owner of the Little Cimarron Farm, to which the McKinley Ditch senior water rights are appurtenant. Western Rivers Conservancy enthusiastically endorses the Colorado Water Trusts' offer of these senior water rights to the Colorado Water Conservation Board to improve flows in the Little Cimarron River.

Western Rivers Conservancy is a not-for-profit organization with a mission to conserve outstanding river systems across the American West. In 2012 Western Rivers Conservancy purchased the Little Cimarron Farm, including McKinley Ditch water rights, in partnership with the Colorado Water Trust specifically to recover flows in the Little Cimarron River. At that time our organizations envisioned an alternative to the once-assured fate of the farm, to have the water stripped away, and to be fragmented into 35-acre home sites.

The Colorado Water Trust's offer is groundbreaking because of its context in relation to the Colorado Water Plan and the state's need to balance water uses while ensuring maximum utilization of water resources. The Colorado Water Conservation Board's involvement will allow for continued agricultural production while substantially improving aquatic habitat in the Little Cimarron River, demonstrating that these uses can be compatible and not exclusive. Furthermore, the acquisition would create connectivity between two existing instream flow reaches, benefitting significant, contiguous stream reaches within the Cimarron River system.

Alongside the Colorado Water Trust's efforts to benefit the Little Cimarron River, Western Rivers Conservancy is pursuing a series of parallel strategies to permanently protect the agricultural land base of the Little Cimarron Farm, and to help other irrigators understand how implementing similar water strategies will impact agricultural productivity and their bottom line. We are working closely with Colorado State University researchers to document and analyze how modifications to irrigation patterns will impact crop yields and quality, as well as how crops and pasture respond to and recover from decreased irrigation. In addition, Western Rivers Conservancy is working with Colorado Open Lands and the Gunnison Land Preservation Fund to limit future development on the Little Cimarron Farm through the use of a perpetual conservation easement.

All in all, the offer before you represents the culmination of years of effort to restore flows to the Little Cimarron River and to protect the Little Cimarron Farm from being fully dried and developed. I encourage the Board to extend its utmost consideration to this offer.

Thank you,

Dieter Erdmann

Interior West Program Director

From: Marta Laylander <marta@bcrlt.org>
Date: Wed, Jul 16, 2014 at 12:50 PM
Subject: McKinley Ditch
To: Zach Smith <zsmith@coloradowatertrust.org>
Cc: lindabassi@state.co.us

Colorado Water Conservation Board

1313 Sherman Street, Room 721

Denver, Colorado 80203

Dear Members of the Board,

We are writing to ask the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to accept an interest in the McKinley Ditch in Gunnison and Montrose Counties for instream flow use from the Colorado Water Trust. This voluntary, market-based project will pioneer the shared use of that water for both irrigation and to restore flows to the Little Cimarron River.

As the Stewardship Director for the Black Canyon Regional Land Trust I have personal knowledge of the property and water that is involved. We hold conservation easements on many properties in the area, and actually have a conservation easement on the property directly adjacent to this land in question. The proposal from Colorado Water Trust makes very good sense locally. We often have good stream flow in the spring time from snow melt runoff with abundant water for everyone. That is when they propose to use the water right to irrigate the parcel of land and maintain it in green growing condition. Then when things warm up and dry out in the summer when the Colorado Water Trust proposes to take the water and use it for in stream flows, we are often blessed with frequent afternoon monsoonal moisture in the area, that will continue to support the vegetation on the land. It will not be as productive as it would if it were continually irrigated, as it is historically done in the area, but what Colorado Water Trust proposes is certainly the second best choice to protect the land and water. If they chose to "buy and dry", the land would soon be brown and dead, and then taken over by weeds, and soon invaded by prairie dogs. All of this would adversely affect the neighboring properties, many of which are conserved with Black Canyon Regional Land Trust, and others. After reviewing the Colorado Water Trust proposal for the management of this land and water, I do think their proposal has a good chance of working out. I have lived here in Montrose for 20 years, and am a farmer and rancher as well, so I live with the seasons and the weather. This will be a ground breaking effort in the Cimarron Valley to make limited resources fill many needs.

The benefit from this water right is substantial: the CWCB holds one instream flow water right upstream of the McKinley headgate and a second right downstream on the Cimarron River. The Little Cimarron is almost completely dry below the McKinley headgate, even in water plentiful years. Obtaining this right for the instream flow program will help re-water a dry portion of the stream, help connect two existing instream flow water rights, will preserve and improve the natural environment, while helping to maintain the agricultural heritage of the area.

Right now the CWCB engaged in a statewide effort to develop a plan and tools to meet the needs of growth, agriculture, and the environment. We believe this transaction meets such a statewide goal: it recognizes the values of

irrigated agriculture and the environment and provides a groundbreaking model that could serve future agriculture and conservation partnerships in Colorado. There are few tools that can serve these purposes and so we urge you to support this one.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Marta Laylander, Stewardship Director
Black Canyon Regional Land Trust
O: 970-240-2050 | C: 970-209-6005
1561 Oxbow Drive Montrose, CO 81401



July 14, 2014

Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

RE: Instream Flow Acquisition on McKinley Ditch

Dear Members of the Board:

Conservation Colorado strongly supports the proposed instream flow acquisition on McKinley Ditch. This voluntary, market-based project presents an exciting opportunity that will pioneer the shared use of water that allows for continued historical irrigation of pasture land and restoring flows to the Little Cimarron River.

Colorado is hard at work developing a water plan and policies that will lead us into a sound and secure water future. We know that this means implementing innovative and creative water sharing agreements that recognize and support the value of our agricultural heritage, booming recreational industry and healthy, flowing rivers.

In addition to creating a new tool for the toolbox, this water right provides significant benefits to a drying and impaired river. The CWCB holds one instream flow water right upstream of the McKinley headgate and a second right downstream on the Cimarron River. The Little Cimarron is almost completely dry below the McKinley headgate, even in water plentiful years. Obtaining this right for the instream flow program will help re-water a dry portion of the stream, help connect two existing instream flow water rights, and will preserve and improve the natural environment, all while helping to maintain the agricultural heritage of the area.

Conservation Colorado supports the McKinley Ditch project to restore the flows in the Little Cimarron River and as an important flexible, market-based tool that meets multiple needs and goals. We hope the CWCB will accept the water rights as an instream flow.

Sincerely,

Theresa M. Conley

CC: Lindsay Cox (lindsay.cox@state.co.us)
Linda Bassi (Linda.Bassi@state.co.us)
Zack Smith, Colorado Water Trust (zsmith@coloradowatertrust.org)



July 10, 2014

Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Members of the Board:

Environmental Defense Fund supports the proposed McKinley Ditch instream flow acquisition. This innovative project will improve stream flows in the Little Cimarron River while continuing the irrigation of the historic ranch pastures. Flexible agreements like this one that recognize and support both the agricultural heritage and environmental values of the region are critical to the future of Colorado.

As Colorado grapples with how to manage in an increasingly dry and uncertain water future, the resiliency of our agricultural economy and our working rivers is at risk. Water sharing arrangements like this one provide opportunities to address tradeoffs and meet various needs. The application of this split-season transaction will both maintain a vibrant agricultural operation and improve the Little Cimarron River.

In light of Colorado's ongoing efforts to develop its first state water plan, the McKinley Ditch instream flow project is a model for the kind of solutions that should be seriously considered to meet our present and future water needs. Market-based solutions like this one that respect private property rights can be structured to address the needs of municipal growth, agricultural profitability, and environmental values. We hope that the members of the board will embrace the development of alternative transfers and new incentive structures that support appropriate growth while avoiding the permanent dry-up of agricultural land and providing the means for the enhancement of Colorado's \$9.5 billion recreational economy.

Environmental Defense Fund supports the McKinley Ditch project as both a worthy addition to Colorado's instream flow program and an important step in the development of a flexible and meaningful state water plan. We hope the CWCB will accept the water rights as an instream flow and would be happy to answer any questions that may arise.

Sincerely,

Aaron Citron
Project Manager and Attorney
Environmental Defense Fund

Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203

July 7, 2014

Dear Members of the Board:

I am writing to ask the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) to accept an interest in the McKinley Ditch in Gunnison and Montrose Counties for instream flow use from the Colorado Water Trust. This project will help restore flows to the Little Cimarron River while helping preserve irrigated agriculture in the area.

Meadow rights are a valuable piece of Colorado's water heritage, and this unique partnership can provide opportunities to protect aquatic species in our state. Obtaining this right for the instream flow program will help re-water a dry portion of the stream, help connect two existing instream flow water rights, and will preserve and improve the natural environment.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this important instream flow use request from the Colorado Water Trust.

Sincerely,



Tom Cech, Director
One World One Water Center for Urban Water
Education and Stewardship
Metropolitan State University of Denver
Denver, Colorado 80217-3362

