



COLORADO

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

TO: Colorado Water Conservation Board Members

FROM: Ted Kowalski, Interstate and Federal Section

DATE: September 11-12, 2014

AGENDA ITEM: Item 17; Regional Conservation Partnership Program Letter

The enclosed memo and template letter of support for the proposal entitled, *Modernizing Agricultural Water Management in the Lower Gunnison River Basin: A Cooperative Approach to Increased Water Use Efficiency and Water Quality Improvement*, was provided to CWCB staff from Dave Kanzer of the Colorado River Water Conservation District. CWCB staff seeks guidance and input from the Board regarding their support of the proposal.





MEMORANDUM

TO: JAMES EKLUND, DIRECTOR, COLORADO WATER CONSERVATION BOARD
CC: ERIC KUHN, GENERAL MANAGER, COLORADO RIVER DISTRICT
FROM: DAVE KANZER, P.E., SENIOR WATER RESOURCES ENGINEER
SUBJECT: LOWER GUNNISON PROJECT – A REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM PROJECT

This informational memo briefly describes a new competitive cost-sharing grant program and seeks a Board resolution of support and a signed letter of participation.

The 2014 Farm Bill created a new conservation program entitled the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and designated the Colorado River Basin as a Critical Conservation Area (CCA). Pursuant to this program and designation, the River District, on behalf of a series of agricultural water providers and producers, created a pre-proposal for grant funding. Entitled “*Modernizing Agricultural Water Management in the Lower Gunnison River Basin: A Cooperative Approach to Increased Water Use Efficiency and Water Quality Improvement*”, hereafter known as “the Lower Gunnison Project”, was selected by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to move forward and to prepare a full proposal.

In short, the grant proposal seeks significant financial and technical assistance (approximately \$40MM in total, including other federal, state and local cost share) to perform modernization and system optimization activities to increase agricultural water use efficiency on a broad sub-watershed basis. Five areas are targeted within the Lower Gunnison Basin (below Morrow Point dam) for off-farm water conveyance and on-farm application system improvements and integration. The 6-page pre-proposal contains specific details and is available for review, upon request.

The intent of the project is several fold: to increase agricultural water availability and certainty, to enhance water quality by minimizing salt and selenium loading, to address declining soil health issues and to benefit in stream habitat, especially in downstream designated and occupied critical habitat for the benefit of threatened and endangered species. Meeting these important project objectives will significantly and directly benefit the state’s natural resources.

As the lead entity for the Lower Gunnison Project, the Colorado River District, hereby requests input and formal support from the CWCB as we move forward and prepare a the full proposal for the October 2nd deadline. As such, we request that you direct your staff to continue to work with the River District and the RCPP members and to provide a Letter of Support / Participation (signed by, or on behalf of, the Board chair). For your convenience, attached is a ‘letter of support template’ for your consideration and customization.

It is important to note that although, the River District is the lead partner in this effort, it is anticipated that the local entities (primarily public water conservancy districts and private

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agricultural producer groups) will contract directly with the USDA-NRCS, should the grant funds be awarded, and to leverage existing and financial resources (e.g., CWCB ATM / WSRA / Construction Bill funds, River District funds, other federal funds like the USDOI-BOR Memorandum of Agreement, Salinity Program, WaterSmart as well as other non-governmental funding – The Nature Conservancy and Trout Unlimited), that may be available to these individual entities.

Thank you for allowing me to brief the Board and to present some additional specifics, designs and maps on September 12th at 1 pm. I look forward to discussing this further with you and your board.

Letter of Support Template

The template below has been developed for stakeholders who have been requested to provide a letter of support on behalf of the proposal entitled, *Modernizing Agricultural Water Management in the Lower Gunnison River Basin: A Cooperative Approach to Increased Water Use Efficiency and Water Quality Improvement*, to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Please submit your letter of support (please edit the example letter below as you see fit, be sure to accept all changes and finalize as a PDF, if possible) by **September 22, 2014**, to Dave Kanzer, Senior Water Resource Engineer, at the Colorado River Water Conservation District (CRWCD); dkanzer@crwcd.org or (970) 945-8522 Ext. 224.

Thank you very much for your support!

September 22, 2014

Mr. Mark A. Rose, Director
Financial Assistance Programs Division
Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service
RCPP Application
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013-2890

Dear Mr. Rose,

Please accept our enthusiastic letter of support for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding proposal entitled, *Modernizing Agricultural Water Management in the Lower Gunnison River Basin: A Cooperative Approach to Increased Water Use Efficiency and Water Quality Improvement* (hereinafter referred to as the "Lower Gunnison Project").

The Colorado River Basin faces many difficult issues and is in need of a coordinated approach to address significant challenges, including the lack of sufficient water quantity and impaired water quality. In addition, areas of the basin are affected by degraded soil conditions and habitats. Specifically, antiquated and inefficient irrigation delivery systems and irrigation practices have resulted in salt and selenium loading to local waterways and have contributed to poor soil health and habitat degradation for threatened and endangered species, thereby complicating regulatory and environmental compliance. The Lower Gunnison Project tackles these difficult issues by building strategic relationships between water providers, agricultural producers and disparate local, state and federal agencies; and provides sufficient funding to implement critical coordination and modernization activities and helps achieve the goals of the RCPP and the Colorado River Basin that was designated as a Critical Conservation Area.

The Lower Gunnison Basin Project was developed with significant input and engagement from agricultural producers, water providers, and land and water management agencies/entities representing local, regional and national concerns and represents our common goal of protecting our agricultural heritage and its sustainability while addressing important local natural resource concerns. In fact, we not only provided input to the Lower Gunnison Project, but our (agency/entity/organization) is committed to providing \$\$\$\$ of (Please specify: in-kind services, cash match, or administrative support) toward the (Name the Project) which is a sub-component/sub-project of the Lower Gunnison Project.

In closing, we urge you to give your full support to the innovative and unique Lower Gunnison Basin Project. We hope you agree that we all need this type of locally coordinated, comprehensive strategy that not only maximizes agricultural water use efficiency and promotes natural resource sustainability but

which provides a viable option to harmful “buy and dry” practices that have occurred in other parts of the western United States.

Sincerely,

(Entity Signature)