



RIO GRANDE
HEADWATERS LAND TRUST

May 29, 2014

Colorado Water Conservation Board
Colorado Healthy Rivers Fund
Attn: Chris Sturm
1313 Sherman St., Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203

Re: OE PDA 13000000109

Dear Mr. Sturm:

The Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) is incredibly honored to have received a watershed tax check off grant in the amount of \$10,000.00 to develop a landscape-scale initiative along the Conejos River. The grant agreement (purchase order) is dated May 30, 2013. Included in this report are the history of the grant and project along with the specific objectives, results, lessons learned and future efforts.

This grant supported core planning, education and implementation of RiGHT's "*Conserving the Conejos: A Colorado Treasure*", our program to advance conservation along the Conejos river in Colorado. The Conejos River is one of Colorado's last major mountain rivers with significant intact private farm and ranch land with substantial opportunity to conserve important wildlife habitat (including habitat for the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher), senior surface water rights, internationally important wetlands, scenic views and agriculturally productive farmland. Protecting this watershed, with its rich cultural heritage, is an important part of preparing for the future while protecting what makes Colorado special.

If you have any questions about this report, please don't hesitate to contact me at (719) 657-0800.

Sincerely,

Nancy Butler
Executive Director

Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust
P.O. Box 444
Del Norte, CO 81132

Specifically associated with this grant were the following objectives and associated results:

Identify Conservation Opportunities:

Goal: Using GIS, we wanted to identify priority parcels for conservation using information on land parcel size, wetland acres, size of riparian corridors, potential wildlife habitat, and proximity to other protected land.

Results: We were able to acquire the GIS data and create a comprehensive map book of the Conejos River Corridor, identifying parcels equal to or greater than 60 acres in the flood plain and tie each of the parcels back to the landowner. This data is tremendously helpful for us to analyze landownership and conservation data as we work to set conservation priorities and work on existing projects and consider new projects.

Outreach and Education:

Goal: Begin targeted outreach and education efforts in Conejos County, including updating many of our materials, including our website and three-fold brochure, and distributing these materials throughout the county.

Results: We did not end up using these funds to update our three panel brochure, but we did use these funds to help update our website and to conduct outreach efforts in the Conejos. We visited with County Commissioners and landowners interested in conservation easements. In 2013, we completed a conservation easement along the Conejos River (see implementation below) and did outreach with several other landowners along the corridor. This year, we are working on two additional projects, with a third potential for a total of an additional 2,800 acres. (Note that no grant funds were used on these two additional projects; however, they are an outgrowth of this work).

Implementation:

Goal: Support staff time, office expenses, and travel to implement conservation projects.



Results: This funding was tremendously helpful for us to implement and complete a conservation easement on the beautiful 790 acre Garcia Ranch in 2013. The ranch has over 500 acres of wetlands on it and is extremely valued for its wildlife habitat and agricultural productivity. Landowner, Reyes Garcia, (a retired philosophy professor) wrote about its protection:

"Surely a conservation agreement is recommitment to a more original contract between humanity and the whole of the natural world represented in the ancient flood stories by the rainbow as a sacred promise to cherish and safeguard one another".

Lessons Learned and Future Efforts: When we started this project, we had only worked on one conservation easement along the Conejos, and that was because it was the confluence of the Conejos and the Rio Grande and at that time we were more interested in the Rio Grande. Now we have a better idea of the conservation values of the Conejos River, and they are stunning. A wide broad flood plain created by a combination of the Conejos and parallel San Antonio rivers creates a rich mosaic of wetlands up and down the corridor. Those wetlands create Southwestern Willow Flycatcher habitat and big game, such as elk and deer. These ranches are also agriculturally productive and often owned by multi-generational families (such as the Garcia's) with a deep relationship to the land.

We've also learned more than we realized we were going to about the Conejos, the complexity of water rights along this corridor, and the hurdles of working in a culturally different area than we are used to working in. As with most things, this project has not been without its challenges, but now we have closed on one project and have the opportunity to work on three more. These projects can take years to develop, so in just a couple of years' time, that is significant progress.

Project Name : Conserving the Conejos: A Colorado Treasure

Grantee: Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust

Address: P.O. Box 444, Del Norte, CO 81132

Phone No.: 719-657-0800

CWCB Contract or Purchase
Order No.: 13000000109

Grant Amount: \$10,000

Date of Invoice: 29-May-14

Task	Description	Total Budget/Grant Funds	Previously Invoiced	Current Invoice	Total Actual	Percent Complete
1. Staff Time	GIS Analysis, Implementation and Outreach	\$7,500	\$6,761	\$0	\$6,761.00	100.0%
2. GIS Data and Purchase	Acquiring GIS Data	\$1,500	\$0	\$800	\$800.00	100.0%
3. Consultant	Implementation and Outreach	\$1,000	\$1,739	\$700	\$2,439.00	100.0%
	TOTALS	\$10,000	\$8,500	\$1,500	\$10,000	

Submitted by: Nancy J. Butler

Title: Executive Director