

Rio Grande Inter-Basin Roundtable
c/o San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District
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January 8, 2014

Mr. Michael King, Executive Director
Colorado Department of Natural Resources

Mr. Craig Godbout, Program Manager, Water Supply Planning Section
Colorado Water Conservation Board

WSRA FUNDING REQUEST

Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust – Rio Grande Initiative’s - Campbell-Redden Property and Dugan Ranch Conservation Easements

Gentlemen:

The Rio Grande 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 unanimous support of the R.G.R.T. 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 Campbell-Redden Property and Dugan Ranch Conservation Easement projects*.

Begun in 2007, the *Rio Grande Initiative* is a collaborative project to protect land and water along the Rio Grande corridor in the San Luis Valley of southern Colorado. The *Initiative* has a proven track record of success and this landscape scale conservation effort has involved many of our Roundtable members in RiGHT’s work with the key partners including The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited. Thanks to the CWCB’s prior WSRA awards totaling over \$2 million, along with substantial matching funds and landowner contributions, the *Rio Grande Initiative* has protected a number of working ranches and senior water rights in strategic locations along the Rio Grande in Colorado.

With sustained interest from landowners and funding support from Great Outdoors Colorado, Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife, the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, local counties, and many private foundations and individual supporters, RiGHT has effectively tripled the pace of conservation along the Rio Grande in

the past six years. To date, nearly 25,000 acres and 43 river miles have been protected and over \$40 million of conservation value have been achieved to date. 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 long worked in close collaboration with the area's various water, wildlife and land management agencies and districts as well as our farmers and ranchers.

The *Rio Grande Initiative* is an important contributor to the R.G.R.T's. core purpose: ".....to achieve water sustainability for the Basin....". By conserving key parcels and their senior surface rights along the rivers, this effort is assisting 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 big and small game, waterfowl and many migrating and breeding bird species (including the federally endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher and threatened Yellow-billed cuckoo), 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 the area's aquifers; and,
- Helping secure and sustain river flows for recreational opportunities and preserving the scenic beauty of our river corridors.

By stabilizing the land and water along the river, many opportunities for restoration, ecological enhancement, and management improvements are possible far into the future. 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, river functions and future opportunities will be lost. RiGHT sees the unfortunate results of poorly planned river corridor development and the effects of dewatered riparian areas across Colorado.

As the application outlines, this project will permanently protect two adjacent properties, the Campbell-Redden Property (90 acres) which has a significant percentage of the remaining unencumbered Silva Ditch, the # 1 water right on the Rio Grande in Colorado, and the Dugan Ranch (316 acres) and their share of the # 3 priority surface water right, through the purchase of two voluntary conservation easements.

These conservation easements represent an exceptional conservation opportunity to help meet the needs of the Basin and the State.

At the December 9, 2014, Roundtable Meeting the Members unanimously voted to support this WSRA request for \$20,000 of Rio Grande Basin Funds and \$130,000 of Statewide funds. This Project also has letters of support from the Rio Grande Water Users Association; District 3 Engineer of the Colorado Division of Water Resources, regarding the importance of such projects to the Rio Grande Compact administration; and the City of Monte Vista (which is just down-river from both properties).

The R.G.R.T. appreciates the support of Colorado Water Conservation Board in assisting in this effort to develop a Rio Grande Basin Water Plan that will serve as a guidance document to the Basin as it addresses the critical future water issues of the Basin, which in turn will assist in Colorado meeting its long term water needs and supplies.

Sincerely,



Michael H. Gibson
Chair, Rio Grande Basin Roundtable

Enclosure (1)

Cc. Nancy Butler, Executive Director, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust