



COLORADO
Division of Water Resources
Department of Natural Resources

Division 3
301 Murphy Drive
Alamosa, CO 81101

Craig Godbout - WSRA Application
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman St., Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

December 4, 2014

RE: *Rio Grande Initiative*: Dugan Ranch (Phase II) and Campbell Property
WSRA Application from the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust

Mr. Godbout:

This letter is in support of application from the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RIGHT) as proposed to the Rio Grande Roundtable at the December 9, 2014 meeting for funding for the *Rio Grande Initiative*, specifically to establish permanent conservation easements on the Dugan Ranch and Campbell-Redden Property for a combined 400+ acres conserved along the Rio Grande river corridor. Through the *Initiative*, conservation easements serve to keep the land base intact, tie water rights to the land, and ensure that historic irrigation practices continue. To complete this project, RIGHT has requested both Basin and Statewide funds that will be matched with funding from either Gates Family Foundation and/or Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), and significant donations from both landowners.

The protection of the hydrologic characteristics of the alluvial corridor of the Rio Grande is important to maintaining a functional river system. This protection includes continued operation of the irrigation systems along the river; systems which were in place when the Rio Grande Compact was negotiated and are thus a part of the underlying physical framework and assumptions of the Compact. The change of these areas from irrigated agriculture to developed land, or simply the removal of water rights from these areas, will have a negative effect on the river and the operation of the Compact.

Today, the irrigated lands on both of these properties create a riparian/groundwater buffer and generate significant return flows to the Rio Grande. These return flows allow for further diversion of water downstream or can be used to assist in Colorado's delivery obligations under the Compact. Bigger water year diversions will tend to "fill" this alluvial area making deliveries during subsequent years less onerous. Absent this buffer and return flows, delivery of Colorado's obligation under the Compact could become more difficult. Protection of the existing functional system will protect other vested water rights and Colorado's ability to deliver its Compact obligations.

Additionally, protection of the riparian habitat that has developed as part of the historic irrigation practices is important. The Rio Grande Basin has several endangered and numerous other wildlife species that rely on this habitat as part of their life cycle. Protecting habitat through conservation easements not only protects the species but also reduces the need for federal mandates to accomplish the same goals.



I recommend that the Rio Grande Roundtable and the CWCB vote favorably on the application and approve funding for this project. If you need further information regarding the benefits of this proposal to Colorado's water administration or to Rio Grande Compact operations please contact me at (719) 589-6683.

Sincerely,



Craig W. Cotten
Division Engineer, Division of Water Resources, Division 3

cc: Mike Gibson, Chair, Rio Grande Basin Round Table
Nancy Butler, Executive Director, Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust





CITY OF MONTE VISTA

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December 2, 2014

Craig Godbout - WSRA Application
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman St., Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Board of Directors,

The City of Monte Vista fully supports the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) and their request for funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board to protect both the Campbell-Redden property and the Dugan Ranch. While not within the city limits, we support this conservation project because it protects those resources and values central to our economy and way of life in Monte Vista.

Conservation easements on these properties will preserve vital agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, and the scenic beauty of the area, all of which contribute greatly to our local economy. Furthermore, it will prevent development of these properties and their associated senior water rights, which helps protect the floodplain and lessens the risk of downstream flooding.

We feel fortunate to live and work in such a beautiful area and applaud the efforts of RiGHT to preserve intact lands in the San Luis Valley and especially along the Rio Grande. Additionally, we see the protection of both the Campbell-Redden property and the Dugan Ranch as critical to the overall efforts of conservation groups and local governments to preserve the land and water that ensures beauty of our valley and our livelihood here.

The City of Monte Vista strongly supports RiGHT and their effort to conserve both the Campbell-Redden property and the Dugan Ranch and we hope that you will do the same. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Forrest H. Neuerburg
City Manager

THE RIO GRANDE WATER USERS ASSOCIATION

147 Washington Street
P.O. Box 288
Monte Vista, Colorado 81144
Telephone (719)852-3556 –Fax (719)589-5958

Craig Godbout - WSRA Application
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman St., Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

December 1, 2014

Dear Members of the Board,

On behalf of the Rio Grande Water Users Association, this letter provides our enthusiastic support for the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust's (RiGHT) application for the *Rio Grande Initiative's* Campbell-Redden Property and Dugan Ranch conservation projects. These projects will keep important land and water resources intact, helping to sustain agricultural productivity and our local economy.

Conservation of both of these properties is also an important part of addressing local concerns regarding our region's critical water resources. The Campbell-Redden property contains a portion of the #1 most senior and other important water rights on the Rio Grande. Together, the conservation of both properties will protect an estimated over 900 acre-feet of consumptive water use annually. By conserving this water with the land, we can ensure that it will be available for both agriculture and wildlife in the future. In addition, securing senior water rights to the river corridor assists the State in meeting its obligations under the Rio Grande Compact.

RiGHT's opportunity to work with the landowners on these projects is the result of years of hard work and previous conservation successes. With their valuable senior water rights, both the Campbell-Redden property and the Dugan Ranch play significant roles in maintaining the historic hydrology of the river, while sustaining a functioning network of wetlands and riparian habitat, as well as the flood plain above the City of Monte Vista. Fragmentation and loss of water resources remain the greatest threats to this habitat and overall river health. Conservation of these ranches would address both of these issues, securing the land and water for the long term and building upon the corridor of protection that RiGHT and their many partners have helped to create over the years.

Thank you for your consideration and we encourage your full support of these two important projects.

Sincerely,



Greg Higel
President