



**COLORADO**

**Colorado Water Conservation Board**

Department of Natural Resources

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**TO:** Colorado Water Conservation Board Members  
**FROM:** Steve Miller, Interstate, Federal & Water Information Section  
**DATE:** July 15-16, 2015 Board Meeting  
**AGENDA ITEM:** 15. RCPP Technical Assistance Funds

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**Background:**

The 2015 CWCB Projects Bill authorized \$500,000 from the Construction Fund to provide technical assistance to applicants and participants in the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). This agenda item is to discuss with the Board potential means and criteria for distributing those funds.

**SB15-253, SECTION 7. Technical assistance for USDA regional conservation partnership program - appropriation.** (1) For the 2015-16 state fiscal year, \$500,000 is appropriated to the department of natural resources for use by the Colorado water conservation board. This appropriation is from the Colorado water conservation board construction fund created in section 37-60-121, C.R.S. To implement this act, the department of natural resources may use this appropriation for the provision of technical assistance to applicants and participants in the regional conservation partnership program. (2) The money appropriated in subsection (1) of this section remains available for the designated purposes until the money is fully expended.

**Discussion:**

The RCPP is a large new competitive program within USDA, making approximately \$300 million per year available for on the ground collaborative agricultural conservation projects. Applicants must provide a minimum of 50% non-USDA cost-share. As a national competitive program the two stage application process is complex and can be intimidating to some entities. The overall quality and detailed identification of practices, costs, and environmental benefits determines the success of an application. In the first RCPP selection process the Colorado River Water Conservation District was successful in obtaining a project focusing on water conservation in the Gunnison Basin. The District is now in the midst of developing the detailed plans, designs, and environmental clearances to allow implementation to proceed. Some of this work is beyond the capacity of existing USDA staff to complete in a timely manner and some is not eligible for use of USDA funds. See attached memo from Dave Kanzer. Mr. Kanzer's memo is provided to illustrate the types of assistance being requested, not to seek Board approval of the specific requests.

In addition staff, wants to begin working with those applicants that submitted successful pre-proposals in the current RCPP grant selection round which closed on July 8, 2015, as well as new applicants in the 2016 round. It is recommended that the process of providing CWCB assistance be both flexible and non-competitive to best meet the needs of applicants and the timelines established by USDA.

**Staff recommendation:** Staff seeks comments and suggestions from the Board on the outlined procedures for providing funds to RCPP applicants and participants. In addition, Board authorization for the Director to begin dispersing funds in accordance with the attached outline, as it may be modified by Board discussion is requested.



## **CWCB RCPP TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OUTLINE**

### **I. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

#### **A. Eligibility**

- Units of Colorado local government: Cons. Dist., Water Conservancy Dist., Water Conservation Dist.
- Environmental and conservation organizations: non-profits and 501(c)

#### **B. Project types**

- Water conservation, irrigation efficiency enhancement (infrastructure and/or soil health)
- Stream restoration, invasive phreatophyte control
- Water quality??
- Aquatic/riparian endangered species habitat and mitigation
- Activities must be located in Colorado

#### **C. Cost-share**

- No mandatory per cent, significant federal funding already being leveraged
- reimburse for in-kind services??
- Payment of administrative charges/fees??

#### **D. Procedure**

- Non-competitive, awards on rolling basis, availability announced on CWCB website
- Director's discretion for grants less than \$25,000
- Board consent agenda for larger grants
- Potential Basin Round Table review/input

### **II. RCPP STAGES and POTENTIAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPONENTS**

#### **A. Pre-proposal, suggested funding limits 0 - \$10,000.**

- Priefeasibility level design and cost estimates
- Grant writing assistance
- Capacity building by sponsor with potential participants
- CWCB staff assistance at no cost

#### **B. Full Application Process, suggested funding limits 0 - \$25,000.**

- Feasibility level design and cost estimates
- Grant writing assistance
- Coordination with local participants
- CWCB staff assistance at no cost

#### **C. Contact Negotiation and pre-Construction activities, suggested funding limits 0 - \$50,000**

- Detailed design and cost estimates
- Environmental compliance
- Attorney fees

#### **D. Project Implementation, suggested funding limits 0 - \$100,000**

- Construction management/supervision
- Project management
- Irrigation water management services
- Technical Service Provider ("TSP") contracts
- Community Outreach / Education

**TO:** STEVE MILLER, SENIOR WATER RESOURCES SPECIALIST, COLORADO WATER CONSERVATION BOARD  
**CC:** ERIC KUHN, GENERAL MANAGER, COLORADO RIVER DISTRICT  
**FROM:** DAVE KANZER, P.E., SENIOR WATER RESOURCES ENGINEER  
**SUBJECT:** CURRENT AND FUTURE SUPPORT FOR THE LOWER GUNNISON PROJECT – A REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT (NRCS)

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The 2014 Farm Bill created a new Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) 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, the River District, on behalf of a series of agricultural water providers and producers, formulated and received an \$8MM grant for a project 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” or “Phase 1 LGP”).

The original grant request was for \$20MM, but due to federal funding constraints, the award was reduced to \$8MM. In effort to restore full funding under the original request, the River District is planning to submit a supplemental RCPP grant funding request for an additional \$12MM (“Phase 2 LGP”).

As the lead entity for the Lower Gunnison Project, the Colorado River District, hereby requests technical and financial support from the CWCB as we move forward with design, implementation and construction of the Phase 1 LGP as well as to assist with the planning and implementation of Phase 2 LGP, assuming that it is approved; awards are anticipated to be made in late 2015).

Specifically, we request that the CWCB direct its staff to provide direct technical assistance, as needed, and the following financial assistance to the River District and sub-awardees to maximize the benefits under the LGP:

**Phase 1 LGP:**

*\$100,000 direct funding for Delta Conservation District (DCD) staffing support* to aid in the implementation of on- and off- farm water efficiency improvement project activities; this funding will expand the local staff capacity to directly administer and manage projects in this district for the 5-year life of the funded RCPP projects (at least \$20,000 per year). It is important to note that these required activities are not payable using RCPP



funding, therefore without this CWCB financial assistance, the DCD cannot afford to directly participate in the LGP projects in their district.

*\$100,000 direct funding for the Shavano Conservation District (SCD) staffing support* to aid in the implementation of on- and off- farm water efficiency improvement project activities; this funding will expand the local staff capacity to directly administer and manage projects in this district for the 5-year life of the funded RCPP projects (at least \$20,000 per year). It is important to note that these required activities are not payable using RCPP funding, therefore without this CWCB financial assistance, the SCD cannot afford to directly participate in the LGP projects in their district.

*\$50,000 direct funding for the River District to support* the planning and implementation for on- and off- farm water efficiency improvement project activities; this funding will offset some staff time and/or enable the hiring of consultants to perform outreach and education (activities that not payable using RCPP funds) and to further coordinate and optimize disparate activities in conjunction with other federal agencies and conservancy districts, as well as with the CWCB, the Gunnison Basin roundtable and pertinent state agencies for the 5-year life of the funded RCPP projects (at least \$10,000 per year).

**Phase 2 LGP:**

*\$10,000 direct funding for the River District to support* the activities related to finalizing the Phase 2 proposal, this funding will offset some staff time and/or enable the hiring of consultants to perform grant writing and coordination with LGP partners (these are required activities prior to potential grant award and therefore that are not payable using RCPP funds).

*\$10,000 direct funding for the River District to support* the activities related to formulating future RCPP proposals (anticipated to be in 2016), this funding will offset some staff time and/or enable the hiring of consultants to identify future project opportunities and to perform grant writing in coordination with other non-LGP partners (outside of the Lower Gunnison Basin but within the River District). These are required activities prior to potential grant award and, therefore, are not payable using RCPP funds.

*Up to \$360,000 direct funding for the River District and partners* to assist in the planning, administration and management of the on- and off- farm water efficiency project activities; this funding is requested to help offset some staff time and/or enable the hiring of consultants to manage and to further coordinate and optimize disparate activities in conjunction with other federal agencies and conservancy districts, as well as with the CWCB, roundtable and pertinent state agencies for the 5-year life of the newly proposed RCPP projects. It should be noted, that such administrative activities are not payable using RCPP funds. It should be additionally noted that this amount is not well known at this time but is based upon and estimate of a nominal amount of 3% of \$12MM.