



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

San Juan National Forest

15 Burnett Court
Durango, CO 81301
Voice: 970-247-4874
TDD: 970-385-1257
FAX: 970-385-1243
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/sanjuan>

File Code: 2500

Date: February 5, 2016

Ms. Linda Bassi
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721
Denver, Colorado 80203

Subject: Draft Recommendation for Little Sand Creek, San Juan National Forest

Dear Ms. Bassi:

The U.S.D.A. Forest Service ("Forest Service") is writing this letter to formally communicate its recommendation for an instream flow water right on Little Sand Creek pursuant to the rules of the Colorado Instream Flow and Natural Lake Level Program. The stream is located in Colorado Water Division 7.

Natural Environment to be Preserved: Resident self-sustaining trout fishery, aquatic macroinvertebrates, water-dependent wildlife habitat, wetlands, and riparian vegetation.

Location and Land Status: Little Sand Creek is located approximately 21 miles northwest of the town of Pagosa Springs. Little Sand Creek is tributary to Weminuche Creek which is tributary to the Piedra River. The recommended reach begins at the stream headwaters and extends to the confluence with Weminuche Creek. The recommended reach is approximately 8.1 miles in length and is entirely located on lands managed by the San Juan National Forest.

Biological Summary: Little Sand Creek is a cold-water, moderate-to-high gradient mountain stream which flows through a forested landscape. The upper and middle portions of the reach are confined, exhibit low sinuosity, and have little to no developed floodplains. The lower portion of the reach is lower gradient, more sinuous, and has a developed floodplain with associated wetlands and meadows. Numerous beaver ponds exist in the lower portions of the reach. In general, stream condition is good to excellent.

Fisheries surveys were conducted by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and the Forest Service in 1976 and 1999. The stream contains a self-sustaining population of hybridized cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki* spp.).

Riparian vegetation is a key component of stream health for Little Sand Creek. The riparian is in excellent condition and provides abundant woody debris, shade, cover, nutrients, and aquatic habitat. It is comprised of a mix of conifers, aspen, alder, willow, and narrowleaf cottonwood. Numerous beaver dams have created habitat complexity and associated wetlands.



R2Cross Analysis: R2Cross quantification data has not been collected on this stream. The Forest Service plans to collect field data necessary for a quantified flow recommendation in 2016 in coordination with CPW and CWC.B.

Water Availability: There are no stream gages on Little Sand Creek. Water availability will likely need to be determined using statistical hydrology or by other means.

The Forest Service is not aware of any diversions or water rights on Little Sand Creek.

Relationship to Land and Resource Management Plans: The San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (“San Juan Forest Plan”) contains resource-specific direction for the management of Little Sand Creek on Forest Service lands.

The San Juan Forest Plan calls for Little Sand Creek to be managed to provide ecological conditions sufficient to support a diversity of native and desired non-native fish species and other aquatic biota in the long-term. It also directs that the management of riparian areas and wetlands maintain or restore the composition, structure, and function of these ecosystems. In addition, aquatic habitat should support well-distributed populations of vertebrate and invertebrate species.

Establishing an instream flow water right on Little Sand Creek pursuant to the Colorado Instream Flow and Natural Lake Level Program would assist in meeting the Forest Plan direction summarized above. Thank you for considering the Forest Service recommendation for Little Sand Creek. If you have any questions regarding our instream flow recommendation, please contact the Forest Hydrologist, Kelly Palmer at (970) 385-1232.

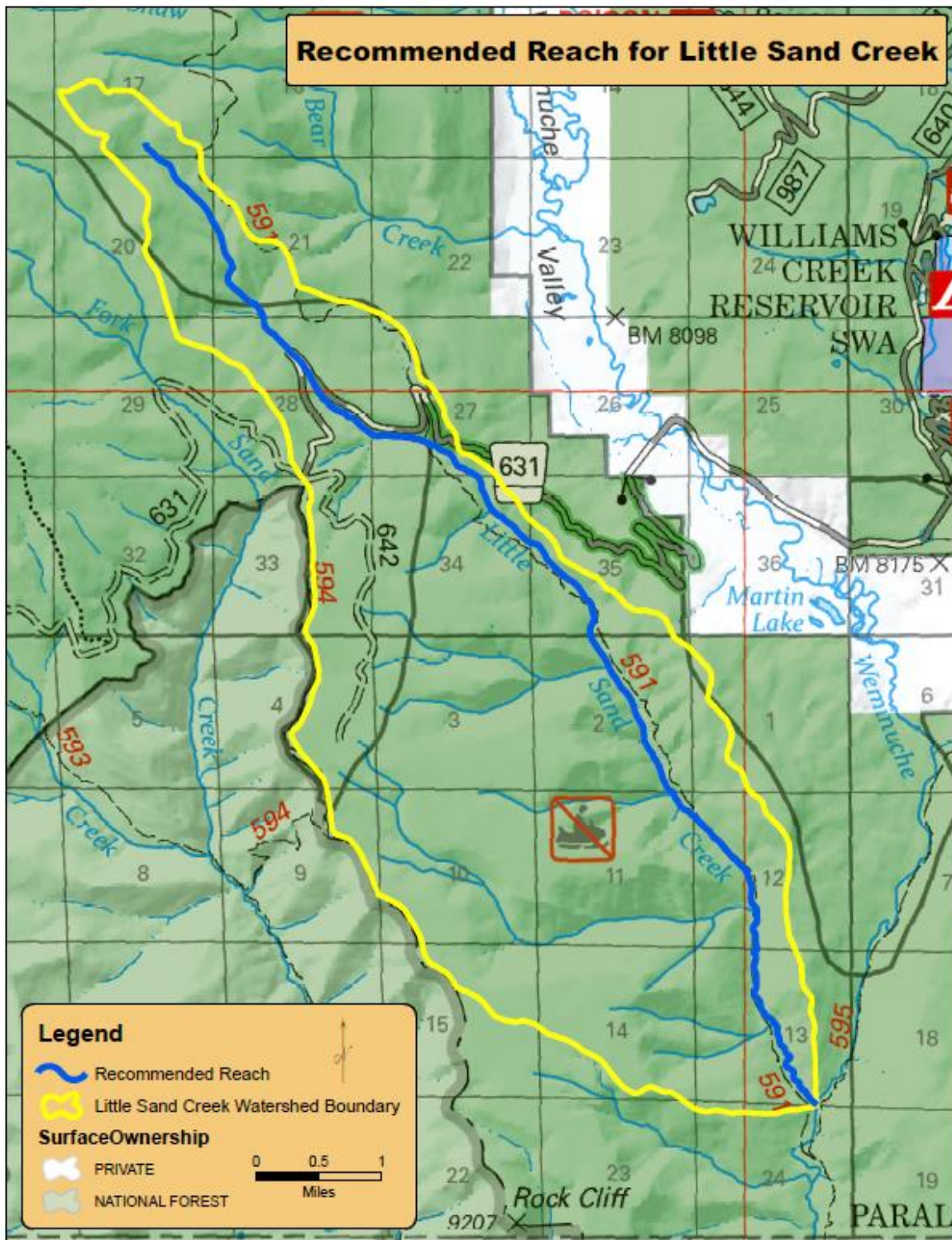
Sincerely,

KARA L CHADWICK
Forest Supervisor

cc: Maribeth Gustafson
Deputy Regional Forester
Rocky Mountain Region
U.S.D.A. Forest Service

Cherie Hamilton
Acting Director Renewable Resources
Rocky Mountain Region
U.S.D.A. Forest Service

Appendix A
Map of Little Sand Creek Watershed



Appendix B

Photos of Little Sand Creek



Cooperative fish survey work between USFS and CPW on Little Sand Creek. This photo shows the dense and healthy riparian vegetation along this small stream.



The Little Sand Fire of 2012 created a mosaic of burn severities in the Little Sand Creek watershed, creating long-term benefits to watershed health.