



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 Rio Lado 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 Rio Lado 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:** Core conservation population of greenback lineage cutthroat trout, wetlands, water-dependent wildlife habitat, aquatic macroinvertebrates, and riparian vegetation.

**Location and Land Status:** Rio Lado Creek is a small tributary to the Dolores River located about 17 miles northwest of the Town of Mancos, Colorado. The recommended reach begins at the headwaters of Rio Lado Creek and extends to the confluence with the Dolores River for a total length of approximately 3.4 miles. Rio Lado Creek flows through 0.3 miles of private land surrounded by National Forest. The remainder of the creek flows through lands managed by the San Juan National Forest.

**Biological Summary:** Rio Lado Creek is a small cold-water stream which flows primarily through forested, confined valleys. Fish surveys were conducted by Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and the Forest Service in 1979, 1997, and 2000. Genetic analysis was performed in 1997 and 2000. From the year 2000 genetic work, it was determined that greenback lineage cutthroat trout, a sub-species of Colorado River cutthroat trout, are present in Rio Lado Creek. Greenback lineage cutthroat trout are a threatened species protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The Forest Service conducted a detailed aquatic habitat survey in 2005. Stream gradients are low to moderate for the first 0.75 miles near the confluence with Dolores River, and the substrate is dominated by coarse gravel and small cobble. Beaver dam complexes located on Rio Lado Creek above the confluence provide natural seasonal barriers to fish migration from the Dolores River. The beaver dams have created a large and complex wetland area which provides excellent



habitat for waterfowl, amphibians, and other wildlife dependent on aquatic habitats. From stream mile 0.75 to the headwaters, stream varies from low to high gradient and dominant substrate size increases somewhat as gradient increases. Numerous trail crossings, a road, and 1970's era logging have influenced the stream but in general the habitat throughout is good.

Riparian condition is good and a critical part of stream health in this alluvial channel. It provides woody debris, cover, shade, nutrients, bank stability, and aquatic habitat. The riparian consists of a mix of conifers, aspen, dense willow, rush, sedge, grass and forbs.

The Forest Service has worked for many years in partnership with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to protect the fishery and habitat in this stream. In addition to cooperating with fisheries and genetic survey work, in 2003 a permanent fish barrier was constructed on the National Forest to protect the greenback lineage cutthroat trout of Rio Lado Creek. In 2015, maintenance work was completed on the barrier.

**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 CWCBC.

**Water Availability:** There are no stream gages on Rio Lado Creek. Water availability will likely need to be determined using statistical hydrology or by other methods.

The Forest Service is not aware of any diversions on Rio Lado 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 Rio Lado Creek on Forest Service lands.

Until a formal change in the status of greenback lineage cutthroat trout is recognized by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, populations of greenback lineage cutthroat trout present in Rio Lado Creek and other places on the San Juan National Forest will be treated as federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act.

This species is also considered Aquatic Special Status Species under the San Juan Forest Plan and receives special management emphasis due to their historic declines and present concern about their viability. The management objectives for Aquatic Special Status Species are to 1) stabilize and maintain existing populations, and 2) expand the distribution and overall abundance of these species to a point long-term viability is no longer a concern.

In addition, the San Juan Forest Plan 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 Rio Lado 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 Rio Lado Creek. If you have any questions regarding our instream flow recommendation, please contact the Forest Hydrologist, Kelly Palmer at (970) 385-1232.

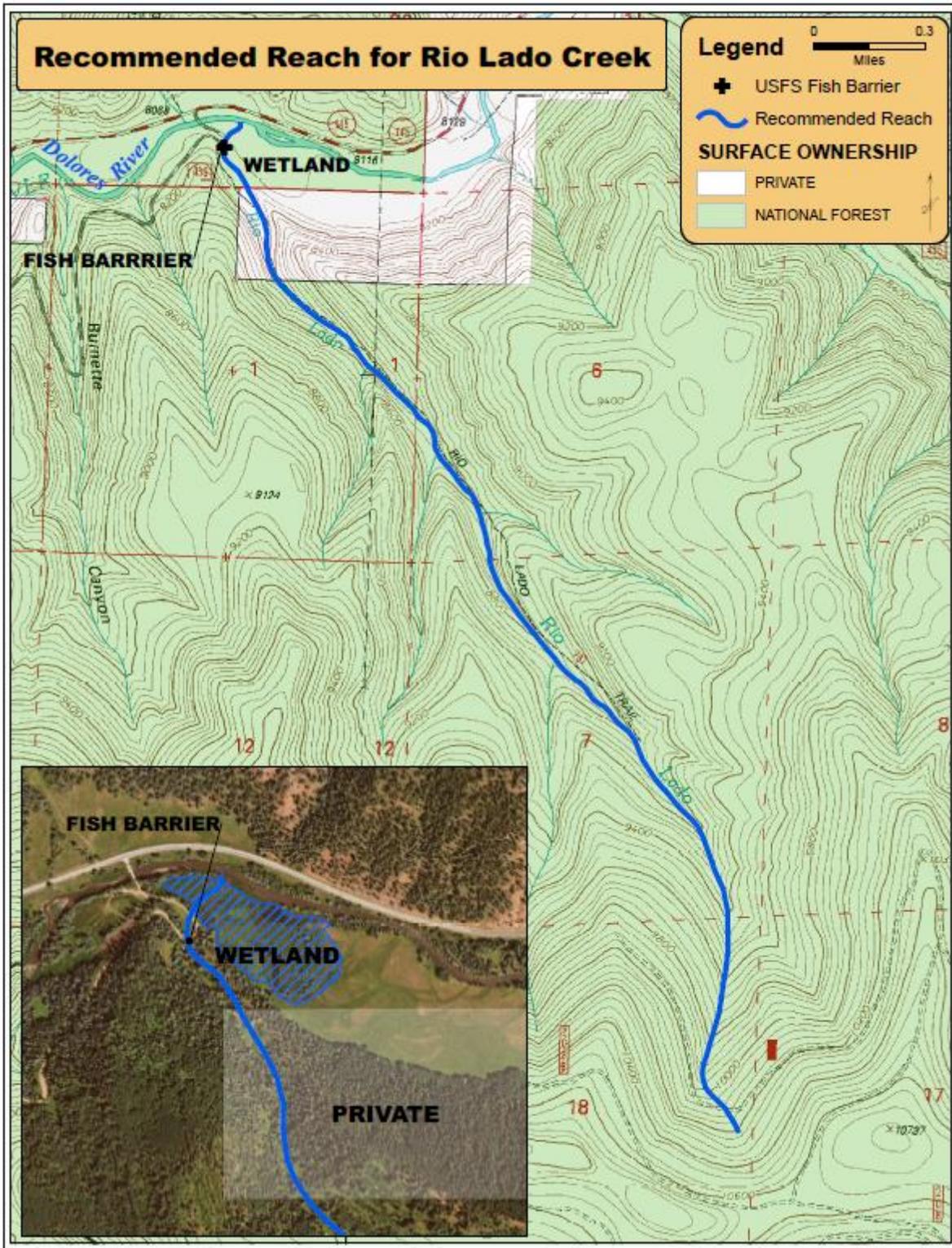
Sincerely,

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



## Appendix B Photos of Rio Lado Creek



Typical channel conditions for the first 0.7 miles Rio Lado Creek above the confluence with East Fork Dolores River.



Rio Lado Creek on the National Forest near the East Fork Dolores River confluence showing large beaver dam complexes.



Riparian vegetation on Rio Lado Creek consists of a mix of native graminoids, forbs, shrubs, conifer and deciduous trees.



Typical channel substrate sizes present in lower gradient portions of Rio Lado Creek.