

**Rio Grande Basin Roundtable**  
**c/o San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District**  
**623 Fourth Street**  
**Alamosa, CO 81101**

January 25, 2016

To: Colorado Water Conservation Board  
C/O Craig Godbout, Program Manager, Water Supply Planning Section  
RE: WSRA FUNDING REQUEST *for the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust's*  
***Rio Grande Initiative - Nash Ranch Conservation Easement***

Dear Members of the Board:

This letter is to express the support of the RGBRT 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 Nash Ranch Conservation Easement*** project.

The Rio Grande Basin Roundtable (RGBRT) has determined that the single, most critical water issue confronting the Rio Grande Basin (Basin) is to work toward sustainability of our surface and ground water. The RGBRT 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 and IBCC Criteria and Guidelines for funding.

With sustained interest from landowners and funding support from Great Outdoors Colorado, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, local counties, private foundations and others, RiGHT has effectively tripled the pace of conservation along the Rio Grande in the past eight years. To date, over 25,000 acres and 47 river miles have been protected and over \$40 million of conservation value have been achieved. 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.

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. 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. 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 and Conejos Rivers.

With this project, **The *Rio Grande Initiative* is an important contributor to the RGBRT's core purpose: "to achieve water sustainability for the Basin."** Conserving key parcels and their senior surface water rights along rivers assists the State in meeting important non-consumptive and consumptive needs by:

- Assisting the Division Engineer in administering the waters of the Rio Grande and meeting Colorado's compact obligations;

- Assisting 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: 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;
- Protecting farm and ranch lands to sustain the Basin's agricultural economy; and,
- Helping secure and sustain river flows for recreational opportunities and preserving the scenic beauty of our river corridors.

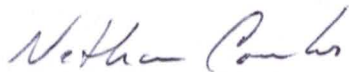
As the application outlines, this project will permanently prohibit development of the Nash Ranch, which contains both banks of almost one mile of river, over 40 acres of federally-endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher habitat, and 1 cfs of the senior Rio Grande No. 2 water right, through the partial purchase of a voluntary conservation easement.

This conservation easement represents an exceptional conservation opportunity to help meet the water needs of the Basin and the State.

At the January 12, 2016 Rio Grande Basin Roundtable Meeting, the Members voted and approved this application with one opposing vote. The opposing view believed that with minimal development there was a better financial gain for the community and that the requested funding could be better spent on projects that he thought would bring real water answers to our basin's issues. That being said this application was strongly supported as a WSRA request for \$10,000 of Rio Grande Basin Funds and \$90,000 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; Rio Grande County; and the Town of Del Norte.

Thank you for your consideration and valued support in the Rio Grande Basin.

Sincerely,



Nathan Coombs  
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Enclosure (1)

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