

Rio Grande Inter-Basin Roundtable
c/o San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District
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Mr. Michael King, Executive Director
Colorado Department of Natural Resources

Mr. Craig Godbout, Program Manager, Water Supply Planning Section
Colorado Water Conservation Board

Implementing Public Education & Public Outreach in the Rio Grande River Basin: Education to Implementation

Gentlemen:

The Rio Grande Inter-Basin Roundtable (R.G.R.T.) has determined that the single, most critical water issue confronting the Rio Grande Basin (Basin) is the current unsustainable management of surface and ground water. The R.G.R.T. 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 & IBCC Criteria and Guidelines for funding. This request for WSRA Funds is to extend the education and outreach efforts that have taken place in the Basin for the past nine years. We are working hard to address current unsustainable management of surface and ground water.

Rio Grande Watershed Conservation and Education Initiative (RGWCEI) is a Colorado tax exempt corporation organized exclusively for conservation and education purposes. All of the Board members of RGWCEI, except for Heather Dutton, are appointed or elected by the five San Luis Valley Conservation Districts, as follows: Center, Costilla, Conejos, Mosca-Hooper, and Rio Grande Conservation Districts – each of which are organizations constituting the Rio Grande Watershed Association of Conservation Districts.

RGWCEI offers both education and conservation programs to youth, young adults, landowners and agricultural producers. The producer programs that have been sponsored addressed the San Luis Valley's declining aquifer issues that have occurred since 2002. These programs partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in the development and administration of the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program and the Targeted Conservation Proposal. Each of these multi-year programs focused on implementing soil and water conservation within the farm unit, and collectively brought \$4.2 million to the Basin.

Over the past 9 years RGWCEI has taken the lead in Roundtable outreach efforts and in collaboration with the Roundtable Education Committee has established a comprehensive education and outreach program. These outreach efforts have been recognized by the

Colorado Water Conservation Board and its constituents and as a result the Rio Grande Basins efforts are among the best in the state.

RGWCEI under the direction of Judy Lopez, and the Roundtable's Education Committee, have worked to expand knowledge, improve educational resources, and increase public understanding in a variety of CWCB's outreach initiatives to include the Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan and the Colorado Water Plan.

The Water Plan process has established the need for, and the importance of, ongoing education and outreach as it pertains to all water concerns. *"Article VII of the Interbasin Compact Committee (IBCC) by-laws address the formation of workgroups to assist it in its deliberations and functions. The Public Education, Participation, and Outreach (PEPO) workgroup is charged with creating a process to inform, involve, and educate the public on the IBCC's activities and progress of the interbasin compact negotiations, and create a mechanism by which public input and feedback can be relayed to the IBCC and compact negotiators. It is the only workgroup written into the legislation (C.R.S. 37-75-106)."*

As a result of these processes the R.G.R.T. Is charged with providing ongoing education and outreach for the Roundtable. The purpose the Project covered by this WSRA request is to continue these efforts over the next three years.

The proposed Project will implement established outreach and education efforts:

- Hire a Coordinator to manage a three year outreach and education effort within the Rio Grande Basin. This Coordinator will operate under the direction of the Rio Grande Basin's PEPO liaison Judy Lopez.
- Begin a mentoring program that will pave a pathway for younger community members to engage with the water community and to step forward and become water leaders.

All of this in addition to these established practices that include:

- Monthly news Articles and radio shows that inform and educate the public on water issues.
- Tours of roundtable projects. Which serve as a public information follow-up for all WSRA funded projects.
- Video vignettes that capture the importance and purpose of the State and Basin Water Plans as well as addressing subjects such as consumptive uses (Agricultural, Municipal and Industrial), non-consumptive uses (Environmental and Recreational), Water Management (Colorado Water Law, Compacts, Well Rules and Regulations and the Groundwater Management Subdistrict Process), and the social aspects of water..
- The Project would also create a Project Tours Schedule as a public information follow-up for all WSRA funded projects.

RGWCEI is requesting \$90,000.00 over three years from WSRA basin account funds. WSRA funds are 65% of the total project cost of \$139,500.00. Matching funds are as follows:

\$7,500.00 or 5% from the RGWCEI as cash; \$27,000.00 or 19% as RGWCEI in-kind participation; \$15,000 or 11% from In-kind services. The attached Budget identifies the various Tasks and their associated costs and composition.

At the regular R.G.R.T. meeting on February 12, 2016 the R.G.B.R.T. Members approved that this request 17 to 2, for funding from the Rio Grande Basin WSRA of \$90,000.00, over a three (3) period, be forwarded to the CWCB for their approval. The following reasons for dissent were noted:

- Tough the basin education efforts are important and the money could be better spent on projects.
- The decline in severance tax dollars has brought a decline in the availability of funds and so we need to ensure expenditures are on water projects.

There were also many comments that recognized:

- The basins outstanding education and outreach efforts.
- The need to continue to educate our constituents
- Education and Outreach are key principles in the Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan and the State Water Plan.

As a result the R.G.B.R.T. urges the CWCB Board to approve this request.

The R.G.B.R.T. appreciates the support of the Department of Natural Resources, the Colorado Water Conservation Board and the Interbasin Compact Commission in assisting in meeting the needs of all users of Colorado's water.

Sincerely,



Nathan Coombs
Chair, Rio Grande Interbasin Roundtable

Attachment (1)

Cc: Judy Lopez w/Attachment