

Rio Grande Inter-Basin Roundtable  
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March 23, 2017

Mr. James Eklund and CWCB Board Chair  
Colorado Water Conservation Board  
1313 Sherman Street, Room 721  
Denver, CO 80203

**Reference: Trinchera Irrigation Company**

Ladies and 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.

The Applicant for WSRA Funding is Trinchera Irrigation Company (TIC), with a request of \$70,000.00 from the Rio Grande Basin Account. This water project is Phase II of a three-phase process, completing the final engineering for the rehabilitation of the outlet works at Mountain Home Reservoir, in Costilla County. TIC will complete the Phase II engineering studies prior to undertaking the state-mandated repair and/or replacement of two and possibly all three gates at Mountain Home Reservoir. Gate #1 operates poorly and the other two have not been opened in several decades.

This Application was unanimously approved by the R.G.R.T. on Tuesday, March 14, 2017, with a request from Members that the proposal be forwarded to the CWCB Board for approval. The request is for funds only from the WSRA Basin Account. TIC made it clear that once total project costs are known, TIC will, at that later time, submit another request for funds in order to implement Phase III of the project. There were no dissenting opinions or concerns expressed by the Members.

A major objective of the Rio Grande Basin Water Plan, in concurrence with the Colorado Water Plan and SWSI findings, has been to support existing and increased storage capabilities and to reduce dependence on groundwater pumping in the Basin by implementing measures that directly improve the management and delivery of surface water. This three-phase water project directly accomplishes both of these objectives.

This project supports the Basin's environmental, recreational and nonconsumptive water uses identified in the Colorado Water Plan by TIC's supporting the terms of its long-standing agreement with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW). Under this agreement, TIC agrees to make every reasonable effort to avoid emptying the reservoir or reducing its level lower than the survivor pool of 653 AF. TIC intends to preserve this conservation pool during construction.

Mountain Home Lake is also part of a Colorado State Wildlife Area, providing valuable recreational and environmental assets in Costilla County. The recreational assets at Mountain Home Lake are especially popular because in this county only 2% of the land is public. Multiple objectives of the project are to 1) support dam safety, establishing reliable water level elevation management of the reservoir; 2) improve water storage management and reduced storage loss, as described below; and 3) preserve and protect the CPW conservation pool to maintain historical storage and release patterns and to protect environmental, recreational and wildlife habitat.

The Rio Grande Basin Non-Consumptive Needs Assessment identifies the Mountain Home Reservoir wetlands as Subcategory 6, per CDM's 12-digit HUC, with "Rare Plants and Significant Riparian Wetland Plant Communities." By not emptying the reservoir, TIC is committed to meeting the nonconsumptive needs of these riparian and wetland areas in consultation with Colorado Parks & Wildlife and Trout Unlimited. TIC has also established a working relationship with the Fort Garland Revitalization Committee, the Town of Blanca, and Costilla County in order to collaborate with them on local environmental and recreation issues.

Trinchera Irrigation Company irrigates over 14,000 acres, with Mountain Home Reservoir providing an average of over 9,000 AF per irrigation season to farmers and ranchers in northern Costilla County and an average of 851 AF for the Trujillo fields at the Blanca Trinchera Ranch. Despite the increased project cost of doing some portions of this work under water, TIC intends to accomplish the restoration project without emptying the reservoir and without disrupting water deliveries to the reservoir's stakeholders. Although draining Mountain Home Reservoir may provide some benefits to CPW, allowing them improve the fishery, TIC asserts that doing so will stop or greatly diminish all fishing for probably 2 or 3 years; threaten both the quality and quantity of water delivered to the area; and place a hardship on those who fish for food at the lake, as this is Colorado's most economically depressed county.

In a typical year, Mountain Home Reservoir delivers irrigation water for about three months and stores water during the remainder of the year. Depending on the storage elevation (i.e. head pressure) the gate leakage has resulted in an average of 170 acre feet per month of storage water loss over the past ten years, or 2040 AF annually. At a 2014 basin-acknowledged estimated valuation of \$135 per acre foot, this is a one year loss of \$275,400, or a loss of \$2,754,000 over the past decade. If only from a financial perspective, this loss must be stopped, requiring that the gates and outlet works be restored to full operating efficiency.

The R.G.R.T asks the CWCB to approve this request for WSRA Basin funding of \$70,000.00 in order to: (1) provide design and professional engineering services to TIC for the Rehabilitation of the Mountain Home Dam Outlet Works; (2) provide construction-cost estimates and evaluation of constructability; (3) gather data and establish a plan to repair, upgrade or replace the gates at Mountain Home Reservoir in order to accomplish optimal operability of the outlet works of the reservoir; and (4) support TIC's objectives, in collaboration with CPW, TU, the communities of Blanca and Fort Garland, Costilla County, and other entities, to protect the recreation, environmental and wildlife habitat assets at this region's very popular Mountain Home Lake.

The R.G.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 and in fostering intrabasin and interbasin communications and discussions. We believe that the above project will assist in this effort.

Sincerely,



Nathan Coombs  
Chair, Rio Grande Interbasin Roundtable

Attachment (1) WSRA Proposal

cc: Trinchera Irrigation Company