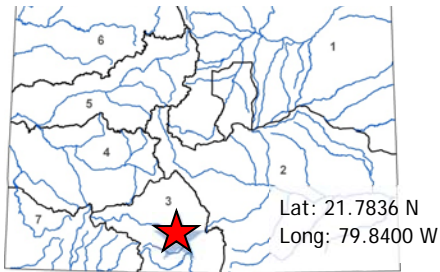




San Luis Valley River & Aquifer Recovery & Enhancement Partnership Colorado Open Lands

May 2019 Board Meeting

Water Plan Grant Application



L O C A T I O N
<i>County/Countries:</i> Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Rio Grande, Saguache
<i>Drainage Basin:</i> Rio Grande

D E T A I L S	
<i>Total Project Cost:</i>	\$77,500
<i>Water Plan Grant Request:</i>	\$35,500
<i>Recommended Amount:</i>	\$35,500
<i>Other CWCB Funding:</i>	\$0
<i>Other Funding Amount:</i>	\$42,000
<i>Applicant Match:</i>	\$0
<i>Project Type(s):</i>	IPP, Study
<i>Project Category(Categories):</i>	Agricultural
<i>Measurable Result:</i>	Agricultural water efficiency and conservation

Colorado Open Lands (COL) is requesting \$35,500 through Colorado's Water Plan Grant to discuss how a conservation easement could be designed to restrict groundwater pumping while providing a means to address groundwater declines and maintain agricultural viability in the San Luis Valley. The goal of such an easement would be to limit groundwater pumping when water resources are scarce and to allow greater flexibility once the aquifers are recovered. Easements also provide a financial incentive for farmers to keep land in agriculture and can provide a means for younger people to enter the business. COL has partnered with the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District, San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District, and the Conejos Water Conservancy District on this planning effort.

The majority of irrigators in the San Luis Valley rely on underground aquifers. The severe drought of 2002 brought these aquifers to the attention of the state, resulting in the development of rules to address injurious depletions of surface water caused by groundwater pumping within its boundaries and provide for the sustainability of the aquifer system. These rules encourage voluntary means for achieving these goals such as the creation of subdistricts, but leave open the possibility of additional state intervention and regulation. Consequently, the water community is looking for additional tools to avoid or reduce the need for state intervention. Furthermore, as demands for water increase across the state, efforts are needed to provide options for producers to maintain agricultural viability while meeting these demands.

Colorado law currently allows conservation easements to tie water to the land and incorporate water lease arrangements, but previous agreements have only focused on surface water rights. Grant funding will be used to (1) convene irrigator work groups to determine easement restrictions and incentive structure, (2) work with district water engineers to determine restrictions and level of participation necessary to make a meaningful impact, and (3) to engage legal and valuation expertise to examine enforcement and economic viability. From these efforts, the partners will develop a model groundwater easement and possibly a suite of other tools that can be piloted in the San Luis Valley to address aquifer sustainability.

Staff recommends Board approval for the full grant amount requested. This project furthers several of Colorado's Water Plan critical action goals relating to agriculture including maintain agriculture viability, promoting voluntary and incentive-based water conservation measures, and conserving irrigated agricultural land for future generations. The project also supports innovative solutions to regional water challenges and alternatives to potential permanent reductions in irrigated agriculture while meeting regional demands. The project also supports collaboration; bringing a diverse group of stakeholders together to leverage public dollars.

Last Updated: June 2018

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Water Plan Grant Application

Instructions

To receive funding for a Water Plan Grant, applicant must demonstrate how the project, activity, or process (collectively referred to as "project") funded by the CWCB will help meet the measurable objectives and critical actions in the Water Plan. Grant guidelines are available on the CWCB website.

If you have questions, please contact CWCB at (303) 866-3441 or email the following staff to assist you with applications in the following areas:

Water Storage Projects
Conservation, Land Use Planning
Engagement & Innovation Activities
Agricultural Projects
Environmental & Recreation
Projects

Anna.Mauss@state.co.us
Kevin.Reidy@state.co.us
Ben.Wade@state.co.us
Alexander.Funk@state.co.us
Chris.Sturm@state.co.us

FINAL SUBMISSION: Submit all application materials in one email to

waterplan.grants@state.co.us

in the original file formats [Application (word); Statement of Work (word); Budget/Schedule (excel)]. Please do not combine documents. In the subject line, please include the funding category and name of the project.

Water Project Summary

Name of Applicant	Colorado Open Lands	
Name of Water Project	San Luis Valley River & Aquifer Recovery & Enhancement (RARE) Partnership	
CWP Grant Request Amount	\$	35,500.00
Other Funding Sources: <u>Regional Collaboration Incentive Fund (applied)</u>	\$	30,000.00
Other Funding Sources: <u>Partner In-kind</u>	\$	12,000.00
Other Funding Sources:	\$	
Applicant Funding Contribution	\$	
Total Project Cost	\$	77,500.00

Last Updated: June 2018

Applicant & Grantee Information	
Name of Grantee(s)	Colorado Open Lands
Mailing Address	1546 Cole Boulevard, Lakewood, CO 80401
FEIN	84-0866211
Organization Contact	Judy Lopez
Position/Title	Conservation Project Manager
Email	Jlopez@coloradoopenlands.org
Phone	719-580-5300
Grant Management Contact	Judy Lopez
Position/Title	Conservation Project Manager
Email	Jlopez@coloradoopenlands.org
Phone	719-580-5300
Name of Applicant (if different than grantee)	Same as above
Mailing Address	
Position/Title	
Email	
Phone	
Description of Grantee/Applicant	
Provide a brief description of the grantee's organization (100 words or less).	
<p>COL is a 501(c)3 nonprofit land trust that exists to protect Colorado's land and water resources. Led by a full-time staff of fifteen and governed by a Board of Directors with wide ranging expertise, Colorado Open Lands operates efficiently and effectively. Our staff has an equally wide range of expertise that spans fundraising, non-profit management, environmental education, community outreach and engagement, and event management, to geographic information systems (GIS), rangeland ecology, agricultural stewardship and systems management, conservation easement negotiations and stewardship, ecosystem science and water rights law. Founded in 1981, Colorado Open Lands holds 414 easements in 44 Colorado counties where we have conserved nearly 500,000 acres and over 358 miles of Colorado's waterways. The local contact for COL will be Conservation Project Manager, Judy Lopez.</p>	

Last Updated: June 2018

Type of Eligible Entity (check one)	
	Public (Government): Municipalities, enterprises, counties, and State of Colorado agencies. Federal agencies are encouraged to work with local entities. Federal agencies are eligible, but only if they can make a compelling case for why a local partner cannot be the grant recipient.
	Public (Districts): Authorities, Title 32/special districts (conservancy, conservation, and irrigation districts), and water activity enterprises.
	Private Incorporated: Mutual ditch companies, homeowners associations, corporations.
	Private Individuals, Partnerships, and Sole Proprietors: Private parties may be eligible for funding.
X	Non-governmental organizations (NGO): Organization that is not part of the government and is non-profit in nature.
	Covered Entity: As defined in Section 37-60-126 Colorado Revised Statutes .

Type of Water Project (check all that apply)	
X	Study
	Construction
X	Identified Projects and Processes (IPP)
	Other

Category of Water Project (check the primary category that applies and include relevant tasks)		
	Water Storage - Projects that facilitate the development of additional storage, artificial aquifer recharge, and dredging existing reservoirs to restore the reservoirs' full decreed capacity and Multi-beneficial projects and those projects identified in basin implementation plans to address the water supply and demand gap.. <i>Applicable Exhibit A Task(s):</i>	
	Conservation and Land Use Planning - Activities and projects that implement long-term strategies for conservation, land use, and drought planning. <i>Applicable Exhibit A Task(s):</i>	
	Engagement & Innovation - Activities and projects that support water education, outreach, and innovation efforts. Please fill out the Supplemental Application on the website. <i>Applicable Exhibit A Task(s):</i>	
X	Agricultural - Projects that provide technical assistance and improve agricultural efficiency. <i>Applicable Exhibit A Task(s):</i>	
	Environmental & Recreation - Projects that promote watershed health, environmental health, and recreation. <i>Applicable Exhibit A Task(s):</i>	
	Other	Explain:

Last Updated: June 2018

Location of Water Project	
Please provide the general county and coordinates of the proposed project below in decimal degrees . The Applicant shall also provide, in Exhibit C, a site map if applicable.	
County/Countries	Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Rio Grande, Saguache
Latitude	21.7836° N
Longitude	79.8400° W

Water Project Overview
<p>Please provide a summary of the proposed water project (200 words or less). Include a description of the project and what the CWP Grant funding will be used for specifically (e.g., studies, permitting process, construction). Provide a description of the water supply source to be utilized or the water body affected by the project, where applicable. Include details such as acres under irrigation, types of crops irrigated, number of residential and commercial taps, length of ditch improvements, length of pipe installed, and area of habitat improvements, where applicable. If this project addresses multiple purposes or spans multiple basins, please explain.</p> <p>The Applicant shall also provide, in Exhibit A, a detailed Statement of Work, Budget, Other Funding Sources/Amounts and Schedule.</p>
<p>The majority of irrigators in the San Luis Valley rely on underground aquifers. The severe drought of 2002 brought these aquifers to the attention of the state, resulting in an order to bring water aquifer levels back to a sustainable threshold or risk shutdown of thousands of wells, which would be catastrophic not only for farming and ranching families, but for the entire San Luis Valley community. Consequently, the water community is looking for a new tool to avoid or reduce the need for state intervention.</p> <p>Colorado Open Lands has partnered with the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust, The Rio Grande Water Conservation District, San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District and the Conejos Water Conservancy District to discuss how a conservation easement might be designed to restrict groundwater pumping. The goal of such an easement would be to limit groundwater pumping when water resources are scarce, and to allow greater flexibility once the aquifers are recovered. The team proposes: 1) to convene irrigator working groups to determine easement restrictions and incentive structure, 2) to work with district water engineers to determine restrictions and level of participation necessary to make a meaningful impact, 3) to engage legal and valuation expertise to examine enforcement and economic viability.</p>

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Measurable Results		
To catalog measurable results achieved with the CWP Grant funds, please provide any of the following values as applicable:		
	New Storage Created (acre-feet)	
X	New Annual Water Supplies Developed or Conserved (acre-feet), Consumptive or Nonconsumptive	
	Existing Storage Preserved or Enhanced (acre-feet)	
	Length of Stream Restored or Protected (linear feet)	
X	Efficiency Savings (acre-feet/year)	
	Area of Restored or Preserved Habitat (acres)	
	Quantity of Water Shared through Alternative Transfer Mechanisms	
	Number of Coloradans Impacted by Incorporating Water-Saving Actions into Land Use Planning	
	Number of Coloradans Impacted by Engagement Activity	
	Other	Explain:

Water Project Justification
<p>Provide a description of how this water project supports the goals of Colorado's Water Plan, the most recent Statewide Water Supply Initiative, and the applicable Roundtable Basin Implementation Plan and Education Action Plan. The Applicant is required to reference specific needs, goals, themes, or Identified Projects and Processes (IPPs), including citations (e.g. document, chapters, sections, or page numbers).</p> <p>The proposed water project shall be evaluated based upon how well the proposal conforms to Colorado's Water Plan Framework for State of Colorado Support for a Water Project (CWP, Section 9.4, pp. 9-43 to 9-44;)</p> <p>The Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan has identified the following resource issues: <i>aquifer decline, prolonged and systemic drought, lack of a diverse economy, at-risk wildlife habitats, compact obligations to downstream states and aging irrigation and municipal water infrastructure</i>. This proposed project speaks directly to aquifer decline as well as at-risk wildlife habitats that are supported by the Valley's agricultural lands.</p> <p>Additionally, this project addresses the following Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal 3 - Sustain the confined and unconfined aquifers in accordance with Senate Bill 04-222 and operate within the State Engineer's new Rules and Regulations for the San Luis Valley. • Goal 5 - Manage water use to sustain optimal agricultural economy throughout the Basin's communities. • Goal 6 - Support the development of projects and methods that have multiple benefits for agricultural, municipal and industrial, and environmental and recreational water needs. <p>Further, the State Water Plan (Section 9.4) identified <i>the need for collaboration and the involvement of a variety of community stakeholders, bringing technical expertise and monetary resources to address these needs</i>. Not only does this project address those outcomes, it also addresses SWSI Section 8,</p>

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pp 8.1), by speaking directly the plans recommendations:

- 1 - Actively encourage projects to address multiple purposes, including municipal, industrial, environmental, recreational, agricultural, risk management, and compact compliance needs.
- 9 - Develop and support risk management strategies so that Colorado can fully use its compact and decree entitlements to best balance Colorado's diverse water needs.
- 14 - Support local water supply planning

Throughout the Colorado Water Plan, there are policy recommendations geared towards the promotion of conservation easements coupled with ATMs to allow for certainty and permanent preservation of agricultural lands. In Section 6.5.2., Agricultural Viability Actions and Strategies, Program to facilitate agricultural opportunities (Page 6-143), the IBCC recommends “that the State needs to provide additional education and assistance to farmers and ranchers to help realize more transactions that allow for ATMs, and to enable new Colorado farmers to successfully enter the agricultural industry. This assistance may include financial and other support for land links, land trusts, and conservation easements that protect working farmland and make irrigated land affordable for the next generation of farmers and ranchers. The program should include education on and assistance with the following:

- Perpetual agricultural agreements, such as conservation easements (such as those demonstrated by entities like the Lower Arkansas Valley Water Conservancy District).
- Other similar contractual agreements that allow for more long-term flexibility (an example is the purchase of water rights in the Arkansas Basin by Aurora Water).
- Funding opportunities for agricultural producers.”

Valley residents are looking for the permanence and certainty of conservation easements, but with a new application to address what they view as a more urgent issue of groundwater depletion. Working closely with water managers and agricultural landowners to develop a new easement model will substantially increase the relevance of easements for these critical stakeholder groups. COL has already heard appreciation from the Valley water community for our willingness to consider a new focus for easements and the ownership that these groups would have in the development of this model increases our chance of successful implementation.

If successful, this new conservation easement model would result in thousands of acres of conserved land and water, and allow a thoughtful, voluntary, and incentive-based approach to limiting water use, instead of an inflexible regulatory response that would devastate the Valley economy. In addition, if this project is successful it may provide a model for successfully managing agricultural water demand without putting agricultural producers and an entire region out of business. This model would be useful in basins across the entire arid West. Most importantly, this new tool would enable a community to reach a sustainable aquifer, to the benefit of residents, visitors, and wildlife.

Related Studies

Please provide a list of any related studies, including if the water project is complementary to or assists in the implementation of other CWCB programs.

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This project is complementary to agriculture water projects throughout the Rio Grande Basin, the State of Colorado and across the U.S. This project further complements larger water conservation and easement projects within the CWCB portfolio. Perhaps the most direct link is in CWCB's Water Supply Planning Section. The WSP group recognizes that *"the last decade has brought many changes to Colorado's water supply outlook. Despite the recent economic recession, the state will continue to experience significant population growth, along with other pressures on Colorado's water"* supply that include: Severe drought, a desire to meet multiple needs (e.g., municipal, agricultural, environmental, recreational) with existing resources, and agricultural impacts due to water shortages, urbanization and transfers to new uses.

Previous CWCB Grants, Loans or Other Funding

List all previous or current CWCB grants (including WSRF) awarded to both the Applicant and Grantee. Include: 1) Applicant name; 2) Water activity name; 3) Approving RT(s); 4) CWCB board meeting date; 5) Contract number or purchase order; 6) Percentage of other CWCB funding for your overall project.

WSRF:

- 1) Colorado Open Lands
- 2) Education & Outreach Implementation in RG Basin (Completed)
- 3) Rio Grande Basin RT
- 4) March 2016
- 5) POGG1 PDAA 201700000375
- 6) 26%

- 1) Colorado Open Lands
- 2) Anderson Lazy EA Conservation Easement
- 3) Rio Grande Basin RT
- 4) March 2018
- 5) CMS 127247 CTGG1 2019-3078
- 6) 18%

- 1) Colorado Open Lands
- 2) South Platte River ATM & Conservation Easement-Riverview Farm
- 3) South Platte Basin RT
- 4) November 17, 2017
- 5) CTGG12019-2940
- 6) 20%

CWP GRANTS:

- 1) Colorado Open Lands
- 2) Enhancing the Colorado Water Plan through Comprehensive Education and Outreach (Completed)
- 3) Rio Grande Basin RT
- 4) November 17, 2017

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- 5) POGG1 PDAA 2018000
- 6) 21%

- 1) Colorado Open Lands
- 2) Acequia Conservation Initiative
- 3) Rio Grande Basin RT
- 4) November 14, 2018
- 5) POGG1 PDAA 201900002510
- 6) 13%

Taxpayer Bill of Rights

The Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) may limit the amount of grant money an entity can receive. Please describe any relevant TABOR issues that may affect your application.

We have no TABOR Requirements.

Submittal Checklist

X	I acknowledge the Grantee will be able to contract with CWCB using the Standard Contract .
Exhibit A	
X	Statement of Work ⁽¹⁾
X	Budget & Schedule ⁽¹⁾
	Engineer's statement of probable cost (projects over \$100,000)
X	Letters of Matching and/or Pending 3 rd Party Commitments ⁽¹⁾
Exhibit C	
X	Map (if applicable) ⁽¹⁾
	Photos/Drawings/Reports
X	Letters of Support (Optional)
X	Certificate of Insurance (General, Auto, & Workers' Comp.) ⁽²⁾
X	Certificate of Good Standing with Colorado Secretary of State ⁽²⁾
X	W-9 ⁽²⁾
	Independent Contractor Form ⁽²⁾ (If applicant is individual, not company/organization)
Engagement & Innovation Grant Applicants ONLY	
	Engagement & Innovation Supplemental Application ⁽¹⁾



Last Updated: June 2018

(1) Required with application.

(2) Required for contracting. While optional at the time of this application, submission can expedite contracting upon CWCB Board approval.



COLORADO
Colorado Water
Conservation Board
Department of Natural Resources

Colorado Water Conservation Board

Water Plan Grant - Exhibit B Budget and Schedule

Prepared Date: 1/31/19

Name of Applicant: Colorado Open Lands

Name of Water Project: San Luis Valley River & Aquifer Recovery & Enhancement (RARE) Partnership

Project Start Date: June, 2019

Project End Date: February, 2020

Task No.	Task Description	Task Start Date	Task End Date	Grant Funding Request	Match Funding	Total
1	Stakeholder Work Groups	June 2019	September 2019			\$4,500
	- Meeting outreach hard costs (printing, advertising)			\$500		
	- Direct meeting costs (catering)				\$1,000	
	- Staff time			\$3,000		
2	Concept Development	June 2019	October 2019			\$59,500
	- Engineering				\$10,000	
	- Legal expenses			\$5,000	\$20,000	
	- Valuation expenses			\$2,500		
	- Staff time			\$11,000	\$11,000	
3	Pilot Identification	October 2019	February 2020			\$13,500
	- Staff time			\$6,000		
	- Legal expenses			\$5,000		
	- Valuation expenses			\$2,500		
Total				\$35,500	\$42,000	\$77,500

Alexander Funk
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman St., Room 718
Denver, CO 80203

January 25, 2019

Dear Mr. Funk,

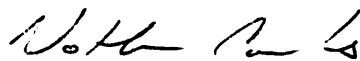
The Rio Grande Basin Roundtable has been actively involved in the development and now the implementation of both our Basin and the State Water Plans. As a basin Roundtable, we encourage our members to reach out to constituents in their communities to look for projects that meet the goals of the State and Basin Water Plans.

To this end, the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable enthusiastically supports this application to the Colorado Water Plan Grant program for San Luis Valley River & Aquifer Recovery & Enhancement (RARE) Partnership. The project is designed to develop an alternative easement model to incentivize reduced pumping in the San Luis Valley's aquifer systems.

This project has been planned by a variety of partners who include Colorado Open Lands (COL), Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RIGHT), the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable (RGBRT), Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD), San Luis Valley Conservancy District (SLVCD) and the Conejos Water Conservancy District. The Colorado Water Plan section 6.2 recognizes that *"that meeting Colorado's water Gap is essential to the long-term sustainability of Municipal, Agricultural, and Environmental systems"* and that achieving this can only be achieved through partnerships like the ones outlined in this proposal. Additionally, the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable has long recognized that in all communities the core social, political and economic institutions are all supported by water and that when we protect the water rights and uses, we will ensure the viability of these communities and their rich ecology, heritage and food production for future generations. We believe that this proposal brings this diverse group of stakeholders together with agricultural producers to just that!

Finally, we are lending our wholehearted support to their application for this important project. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

Very Truly Yours,



Nathan Coombs
Chairman, Rio Grande Basin Roundtable



Rio Grande Water Conservation District

8805 Independence Way • Alamosa, Colorado 81101

Phone: (719) 589-6301 • Fax: (719) 992-2026

Protecting & Conserving San Luis Valley Water

Alexander Funk
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman St., Room 718
Denver, CO 80203

January 25, 2019

Dear Mr. Funk,

Agricultural producers within the Rio Grande Water Conservation District service area have been actively involved in the development and now the implementation of water subdistricts to create and maintain sustainable aquifer systems as directed by the Colorado Legislature. The Subdistrict No. 3 Board of Managers has completed the process of detailing the final Plan of Water Management and the Board of Directors of the District approved the Plan in June of 2018. The Plan was then submitted to the State Engineer and he issued his approval of the Plan in August 2018.

With this in mind, we recognize that a diverse set of tools is necessary to meet the goals outlined in that Plan of Water Management. To this end, the Rio Grande Water Conservation District actively supports this application to the Colorado Water Plan Grant program for San Luis Valley River & Aquifer Recovery & Enhancement (RARE) Partnership. The project will work to develop an alternative easement model to incentivize reduced pumping in the San Luis Valley's aquifer systems. An outcome that would help us meet our sustainability goals. Additionally, this meets goals that are outlined in the both the Colorado Water Plan and the Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan.

This project has been planned in cooperation with a variety of partners that include Colorado Open Lands (COL), Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT), the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable (RGBRT), Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD), San Luis Valley Conservancy District (SLVCD) and the Conejos Water Conservancy District (CWCD).

Funding this proposal would help with the design, engineering and legal development of a ground water easement and will be based on the model of a traditional conservation easement. Groundwater conservation also has the potential to benefit all lands in the San Luis Valley, not just those who enroll in the conservation program themselves. Healthier aquifers will improve stream-flows across the Valley, especially on the Rio Grande and Conejos rivers. Higher water tables also support wetland and riparian health, as well as the flood-irrigated ranches that RiGHT and COL have traditionally focused on protecting in the area.

We are lending our support to their application for this important project. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cleave Simpson", written over a horizontal line.

Cleave Simpson
General Manager – Rio Grande Water Conservation District



Conejos Water Conservancy District

P. O. Box 550

Manassa, CO 81141

Cwcd1971@hotmail.com

Phone 719-843-5261 fax 5452

Alexander Funk
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman St., Room 718
Denver, CO 80203

January 25, 2019

Dear Mr. Funk,

Agricultural Producers within the Conejos Water Conservancy District service area have been actively involved in the development and now the implementation of water subdistricts to alleviate depletions to aquifer as mandated by the State. The Subdistrict No. 3 Board of Managers has completed the process of detailing the final Plan of Water Management and the Board of Directors of the District approved the Plan in June of 2018. The Plan was then submitted to the State Engineer and he issued his approval of the Plan in August 2018.

With this in mind, we are keen to recognize that a diverse set of tools is necessary to meet the goals outlined in that plan of management. To this end, the Conejos Water Conservancy District actively supports this application to the Colorado Water Plan Grant program for San Luis Valley River & Aquifer Recovery & Enhancement (RARE) Partnership. The project will work to develop an alternative easement model to incentivize reduced pumping in the San Luis Valley's aquifer systems. An outcome that would help us meet our sustainability goals. Additionally, this meets goals that are outlined in the both the Colorado Water Plan and the Rio Grande Basin Implementation Plan.

This project has been planned in cooperation with a variety of partners that include Colorado Open Lands (COL), Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT), the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable (RGBRT), Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD), San Luis Valley Conservancy District (SLVCD) and the Conejos Water Conservancy District.

Funding this proposal would help fund that design, engineering and legal development of a ground water easement and will be based on the model of a traditional conservation easement. Groundwater conservation also has the potential to benefit all lands in the San Luis Valley, not just those who enroll in the conservation program themselves. Recharging aquifers will boost stream-flows across the Valley, especially on the Rio Grande and Conejos rivers. Higher water tables also support wetland and riparian health, as well as the flood-irrigated ranches that RiGHT and COL have traditionally focused on protecting in the area.

We are lending our support to their application for this important project. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Nathan Coombs".

Nathan Coombs
Manager, Conejos Water Conservancy District

623 Fourth Street
Alamosa, CO 81101
(719) 589-2230
Heather@slvwcd.org



February 1, 2019

Heather R. Dutton - Manager

Alexander Funk
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman St., Room 718
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Mr. Funk,

I am writing to express the San Luis Valley Water Conservancy District's (SLVWCD) support for the San Luis Valley River and Aquifer Recovery and Enhancement (RARE) Partnership. Through this project, Colorado Open Lands (COL) and the Rio Grande Headwaters Land Trust (RiGHT) will work with local stakeholders to develop a model for alternative easements to incentivize reduced pumping of the San Luis Valley's aquifer systems. The envisioned projects would not only help meet aquifer sustainability goals, but would support the long-term viability of the communities of the San Luis Valley.

This project has been developed through extensive discussions with local partners, including COL, RiGHT, SLVWCD, the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable (RGBRT), Rio Grande Water Conservation District (RGWCD), and Conejos Water Conservancy District (CWCD).

Funding will be used for design, engineering, and legal development of a ground water easement. The project will also include extensive community outreach with diverse local stakeholders. Traditional conservation easements have been very successful in the San Luis Valley and are widely supported across the municipal, agriculture, and environmental communities as a tool to conserve important ecological and community values. Groundwater conservation has the potential to provide great benefits, as it will protect the agriculture, streams, and wetland habitats that rely on the Valley's aquifers.

The SLVWCD whole-heartedly supports the project and is committed to providing continued technical assistance as it moves forward. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this innovative and timely project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Heather R. Dutton".

Heather Dutton

President: Randall Palmgren, Center, CO
Vice-President: Darius Allen, Alamosa, CO; Secretary/Treasurer Marcie Schulz, Alamosa, CO;
Directors: Richard Davie, Del Norte, CO; M. Dee Greeman, Alamosa, CO; Charles Griego, Alamosa, CO;
Steve Keller, Monte Vista, CO; Tyler Neely, Del Norte, CO; Karla Shriver, Monte Vista, CO; Tuck Slane, Hooper, CO.