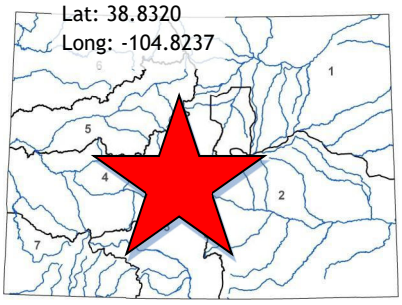
COLORADO
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Department of Natural Resources

Climate Resilient Agricultural Futures
Palmer Land Conservancy

March 2022 Board Meeting

Water Plan Grant Application



LOCATION
County/Counties: Delta, Pueblo, Montrose, Mesa
Drainage Basin: Arkansas, Gunnison, Colorado

DETAILS	
Total Project Cost:	$2,471,288
Water Plan Grant Request:	$664,987
Other CWCB Funding:	$0
Other Funding Amount:	$0
Applicant Match:	$1,806,301
Project Type(s): Study and Construction	
Project Category(Categories): Water Storage & Supply, ATM	
Measurable Result: 80 acres of restored or preserved habitat, 216 acre-fee of water shared through an ATM or water sharing agreement, 397,740 Coloradans impacted by engagement activity	

Palmer Land Conservancy and their collaborators are working with Pueblo Water to establish a strategic dry-up approach for land serviced by the Bessemer Ditch. The approach is to use voluntary measures to remove water from marginally productive lands in order to maintain critical production areas with the goal of maintaining Pueblo County's agricultural economy. The project proponents plan to expand on the capabilities of the decision-support tool developed for the Bessemer Ditch project to support the planning of similar work in the Gunnison and/or Colorado Basins.

This grant will be used to : (1) execute a multi-benefit, farmland-conservation/ATM-demonstration project in the Arkansas River Basin; (2) enhance the utility of the decision-support tool that informs the project—the Bessemer DSS—and which will be used to guide a series of subsequent, similar projects; (3) export Bessemer DSS approaches and technologies to partners on Colorado's West Slope—expanding water optimization efforts from ditch-scale to complex, multi-ditch, basin-scale environments; (4) develop a complementary technology that enables farmland conservation organizations to catalog, monitor, and protect water rights in their conservation portfolios; and (5) publish an agricultural water futures roadmap informed by these efforts to guide the work of farmland conservation organizations across the state. The entire project utilizes a scalable systems approach called Climate Resilient Agricultural Futures and Transformations which guides agricultural water protection and management in ways that sustain production and restore natural systems in the climate change era. Project partners include Colorado West Land Trust and the Babbitt Center for Land Water Policy.

The project furthers several Colorado Water Plan critical action goals. First, the project promotes scenario planning and the use of adaptive strategies to respond to, mitigate, and prepare for climate change. Second, the project seeks to provide technical support for Basin Implementation Plans through continued decision-support development and maintenance in order to explore municipal, agricultural, industrial, and environmental shortage analyses. Third, it looks to support the development of multipurpose projects and methods that benefit environmental water needs as well as water needs for communities and agriculture.

Funding Recommendation:
Staff recommends Board approval of $664,987. This is 27% of the total project costs. The project meets the criteria for the Alternative Transfer Methods/Collaborative Water Sharing by demonstrating a new water-sharing approach that helps conserve working lands and maintains agricultural productivity.