

**COLORADO**Colorado Water  
Conservation Board

Department of Natural Resources

## Colorado Water Conservation Board

# Water Plan

## Water Project Summary

Name of Applicant	High Desert Conservation District	
Name of Water Project	High Desert Drought Concern Gathering	
Grant Request Amount		<b>\$97,360.50</b>
Primary Category		\$97,360.50
<i>Agricultural Projects</i>		
Total Applicant Match		<b>\$55,655.00</b>
<i>Applicant Cash Match</i>		\$40,560.00
<i>Applicant In-Kind Match</i>		\$15,095.00
Total Other Sources of Funding		<b>\$0.00</b>
Total Project Cost		<b>\$153,015.50</b>

## Applicant & Grantee Information

Name of Grantee: High Desert Conservation District  
Mailing Address: 628 West 5th Street Cortez CO 81321  
FEIN: 840,893,956

Organization Contact: Neva Connolly  
Position/Title: Email: [hdc.d.manager@highdesertconservation.org](mailto:hdc.d.manager@highdesertconservation.org)  
Phone: 970-529-8365

Organization Contact - Alternate: Neva Connolly  
Position/Title: Email: [hdc.d.manager@highdesertconservation.org](mailto:hdc.d.manager@highdesertconservation.org)  
Phone: 970-529-8365

Grant Management Contact: Neva Connolly  
Position/Title: Email: [hdc.d.manager@highdesertconservation.org](mailto:hdc.d.manager@highdesertconservation.org)  
Phone: 970-529-8365

Grant Management Contact - Alternate: Neva Connolly  
Position/Title: Email: [hdc.d.manager@highdesertconservation.org](mailto:hdc.d.manager@highdesertconservation.org)  
Phone: 970-529-8365

## Description of Grantee/Applicant

The High Desert Conservation District (formerly the Dolores Conservation District) is one of 76 Districts throughout Colorado. The Colorado State Legislature encouraged formation of local Districts in 1941 with the passage of the Colorado Soil Conservation Act (Title 35, Article 70 of the Colorado Revised Statutes). The Dolores Soil Conservation District was organized on April 11, 1942 per this Act. The District boundaries include all but a small portion of Montezuma County.

## Type of Eligible Entity

- ☐ Public (Government)
- ☒ Public (District)
- ☐ Public (Municipality)
- ☐ Ditch Company
- ☐ Private Incorporated
- ☐ Private Individual, Partnership, or Sole Proprietor
- ☐ Non-governmental Organization
- ☐ Covered Entity
- ☐ Other

### Category of Water Project

- ☒ Agricultural Projects  
*Developing communications materials that specifically work with and educate the agricultural community on headwater restoration, identifying the state of the science of this type of work to assist agricultural users among others.*
- ☐ Conservation & Land Use Planning  
*Activities and projects that implement long-term strategies for conservation, land use, and drought planning.*
- ☐ Engagement & Innovation Activities  
*Activities and projects that support water education, outreach, and innovation efforts. Please fill out the Supplemental Application on the website.*
- ☐ Watershed Restoration & Recreation  
*Projects that promote watershed health, environmental health, and recreation.*
- ☐ Water Storage & Supply  
*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.*

### Location of Water Project

Latitude 37.343867  
 Longitude -108.594989  
 Lat Long Flag Default/Proponent headquarters: If the location cannot be defined with flags above, use location of project proponent headquarters  
 Water Source Dolores River, McElmo Creek  
 Basins Southwest  
 Counties Montezuma  
 Districts 32-McElmo Creek Basin; 71-West Dolores Creek/Tribs.

### Water Project Overview

Major Water Use Type Agricultural  
 Type of Water Project Capacity Building  
 Scheduled Start Date - Design 5/1/2023  
 Scheduled Start Date - Construction  
 Description  
 High Desert Conservation District will seek to address some of the information provided and any existing communication gaps and, more specifically, respond to specific requests for additional information about Colorado Water Law and opportunities for conservation under the law (and without risk to existing rights); convene stakeholders to identify shared goals or opportunities to meet the shared goal of keeping water in the

watershed; create opportunities for information sharing (dialogue) between producers and community members who may have differing views.

As part of the drought concern gathering, HDCD is proposing an outreach and education program that will promote well-informed community discourse regarding balanced water solutions statewide. The outreach will address priorities identified in the Colorado Water Plan and through the concern gathering. HDCD will provide an opportunity to support water awareness education that creates viable and productive agriculture, efficient and effective water infrastructure promoting smart land use; and a strong environment that includes healthy watersheds, streams, and wildlife.

HDCD will focus outreach is two ways; publicly held meetings, inviting partner, stakeholders and landowners to come and voice their concerns; and outreach events to address existing concerns and gaps in information. This outreach initiative will enlist the time of the HDCD district manager, district conservation technician, office manager, and board of supervisors.

### Measurable Results

New Storage Created (acre-feet)  
New Annual Water Supplies Developed or Conserved (acre-feet), Consumptive or Nonconsumptive  
Existing Storage Preserved or Enhanced (acre-feet)  
New Storage Created (acre-feet)  
Length of Stream Restored or Protected (linear feet)  
Efficiency Savings (dollars/year)  
Efficiency Savings (acre-feet/year)  
Area of Restored or Preserved Habitat (acres)  
Quantity of Water Shared through Alternative Transfer Mechanisms or water sharing agreement (acre-feet)

5 Number of Coloradans Impacted by Incorporating Water-Saving Actions into Land Use Planning

250 Number of Coloradans Impacted by Engagement Activity

Other

No additional measurable results provided

### Water Project Justification

Since the 1940's when the High Desert Conservation District (then the Dolores Soil Conservation District) was formed in response to the Dust Bowl, the District (HDCD) has provided information, technical and engineering support, and access to government cost-share programs that deal with the improvement of water distribution, on-farm irrigation systems, noxious weed control, rehabilitation of disturbed areas, and other conservation related activities. The HDCD has established a principal goal of increasing the efficiency of water delivery from the Dolores River, and its tributaries, and water users with McFee Reservoir and Montezuma Valley Irrigation Company water users and its tributaries; with associated goals of:

- To the livestock and crops of the HDCD's 1,100 farms and water users;
- To wildlife;
- To support soil health improvements.

As part of the project and in recognition of increasing and changing pressures on individual and community resources within portions of the Dolores and McPhee Watersheds, the HDCD will undertake extensive concern gathering efforts to strategically and comprehensively assess and summarize concerns within the agricultural landscape. Our concern gathering efforts will begin in 2023 and occur during, and immediately following some of the most severe droughts to occur in recent history in the region.

Beginning in October of 2017 and extending well into the spring of 2022, drought conditions ushered in less than 25-50 percent of normal moisture alongside temperatures that were, on average, 2-4 degrees above normal. The price of hay doubled, ranchers sold their cattle, and farmers let their fields wither and fallow. In 2021, local area farmers received only five to ten percent of their typical irrigation water due to snowpack levels at 32-percent of normal the preceding winter. In April of 2022, most of Montezuma County was considered to be in “moderate” or “severe” drought and was designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a primary natural disaster area due to prolonged drought conditions. Under future climate scenarios, droughts like the one water users in the McElmo and Dolores sub-basins experienced in 2021 are expected to occur every 5-7 years. Rising temperatures and a decrease in winter snowpack are likely to impact all water users.

The long-term drought, combined with the 2021 irrigation allocation shortage, brought climate and other concerns into sharp focus, and tensions into high gear. These tensions have increased with successive drought years and HDCD’s landowners have been at the forefront of the water shortages, diminished crop yields and uncertainty of a future as ag producers. In order to better understand the specifics of stakeholder values and the nuance of individual concerns, HDCD is set to concern gather with the goal of working with landowners, water managers, and stakeholders to articulate shared, forward looking drought contingency goals for people and conservation within the McElmo and Dolores sub-basins. This effort furthers the High Desert Conservation District mission and vision and provides critical feedback from stakeholders to inform on drought actions that can both help prevent water crisis locally and respond to water crisis on a larger scale. This is a proactive step to protect water users and ensure or promote long-term viability of multiple uses under increasing pressure on limited resources.

High Desert Conservation District will seek to address some of the information provided and any existing communication gaps and, more specifically, respond to specific requests for additional information about Colorado Water Law and opportunities for conservation under the law (and without risk to existing rights); convene stakeholders to identify shared goals or opportunities to meet the shared goal of keeping water in the watershed; create opportunities for information sharing (dialogue) between producers and community members who may have differing views.

#### Related Studies

None known

#### Taxpayer Bill of Rights

The High Desert Conservation District has been de-TABORed.